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FOR MATURE READERS

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DESMOND WOLFE IN THE UK

COMPLAINS ABOUT LACK OF SEX!!!

WWE A DECADE IN REVIEW

PT1: 2000-2004

TEAM BLOSSOM

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"Helen hart once got her tongue stuck in the toaster trying to make french toast."
JERRY LAWLER

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TWP Announcements.....

Unfortunately a lot of the advertised articles for this issue have not been included, most significantly the UK and US Indy round-ups. We apologise for this unavoidable omission and will endeavour to have similar features next time. Will you miss the UK event pages, or did you usually avoid them? We'd like to hear your thoughts on this and other topics concerning the magazine - see page 46.

The winner of last month's All Star Backstage Passes is Euan Mackie of Scotland. If your company would like to sponsor a TWP competition please get in touch.

Due to the increasing amount of work involved we are considering releasing TWP as a bi-monthly publication, rather than monthly. An announcement will be made soon.

www.thewrestlingpress.com will now be updated more regularly so please keep stopping by for exclusive news and reviews.

World News

■ by Mike Aldren

Courtesy of
THE WRESTLING GLOBE Newsletter

ROH has filed a lawsuit against Ric Flair stemming from autograph signings that Flair was paid for but then pulled out of last summer. They are seeking a judgment of $40,000. Flair currently has a long list of creditors and is paying alimony on two previous marriages.

Vince McMahon announced on Tuesday 2nd Feb that he was "proudly" shutting down ECW in three weeks to be replaced by WWE NXT which premieres on March 2 from Wichita, KS. The concept is that the show will be built around new faces meaning developmental call ups and maybe some cuts, and there is a twist to the show which hasn't yet been reported. The idea of killing off ECW as a brand has been talked about for months largely due to flagging ratings and pressure from executives at SyFy. NXT, meaning Next, was chosen from a shortlist of names which WWE applied to trademark on January 25. They have also registered the domain name, WWENXT.com.

Taz wrote on Twitter that he didn't like that Vince McMahon didn't thank any original ECW wrestlers or Paul Heyman in his announcement about the end of ECW.

Austin and Triple H both have covers up for Muscle and Fitness' cover of the year. WWE.com is encouraging fans to vote. Well, they are encouraging them to vote for Triple H. No mention of Austin.

Some pretty embarrassing nude photos of Frankie Kazarian [Suicide] have been leaked on to the Internet during the past few days.

Hulk Hogan called Rob Van Dam on Wednesday to persuade him to come to TNA. Van Dam was doing his weekly radio show at the time so he put him on the air. Hogan gave the hard sell and talked about Impact moving to Monday night. He said he talked to Jeff Hardy on Tuesday and they were discussing "whacked out" storyline ideas. Van Dam said he was interested in hearing more and said he would talk to Hogan off air. You can listen to RVD's show at http://blogtalkradio.com/rvdradio.

Velvet Sky and Madison Rayne did a photo shoot for the UK version of FHM magazine. It's a huge coup for the company as FHM is the second biggest selling men's mag in England.

The Sun at www.the-sun.co.uk/wrestling has launched it's annual Golden Robe Wrestling Awards where people can vote for their favorite wrestlers, matches and moments of 2009.

Trish Stratus has landed the lead role in an independent Canadian film called Bail Enforcers -- about a down on their luck team of bounty hunters who run into trouble when they are confronted with a moral dilemma.

Chris Jericho and Gregory 'Hurricane' Helms were engaged in an altercation before their recent arrest on a night out, it has now emerged.

The Cincinnati Enquirer reports that an officer responded to a disturbance at Shell Gas Station in Crescent Springs, KY, at around 4:45am after Jericho and Helms began fighting in the back of a cab. The pair were charged with public intoxication and released after paying $120 in cash. They are scheduled to appear in Kenton District Court on February 16 on misdemeanor charges. The altercation followed a late night drinking session just a few hours removed from WWE's Smackdown television taping at US Bank Arena in Cincinnati. Both Jericho and Helms were "manifestly under the influence of alcohol" at the time of their arrest, according to Erlanger police spokesman Kevin Gilpin. "We get there and they basically say Helms kind of turned into an ass and starts kind of getting physical inside the cab," Gilpin said. Helms allegedly struck four people, including Jericho, and an unidentified man (later revealed as Matt Hardy). No injuries were reported although Helms did have a visible mark on his face in his mugshot. Assault charges were not brought because the parties concerned refused to press charges. Helms reportedly fled the scene right after the incident but returned to the gas station soon after, where he, along with Jericho, was arrested for being drunk in public. Matt Hardy also fled the scene but was never found.

Shawn Michaels has now smashed Steve Austin's record of most Rumble eliminations with 41.

Bret Hart met briefly with TNA staffers after Raw at Bailey's, an Irish pub in downtown Nashville.

WWE Hall of Famer Jack Brisco passed away on Feb 1 at the age of 68. He had been in poor health for some time although his family had asked for his ailments to be kept private. He died due to complications from heart surgery that he underwent two week's previous.

WWE has re-signed Adam Birch, the former Joey Mecury/Matthews, who formed the team MNM with John Morrison and Melina in OVW and on Smackdown. His last run in 2007 didn't end too well after he was abruptly released following a Wellness Program violation. He has done several interviews since then praising WWE for firing him and putting him through rehab for pain pill addiction after he suffered a severe facial injury during the 2006 Armageddon pay-per-view.

The story on the ladder match in Manchester, England that never happened was that TNA couldn't find a suitable ladder. All the ladders in the building were single sided and made of aluminum so they would have been destroyed after one spot. By the time somebody raised it as an issue it was too late to send someone out to find a new ladder.

Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff were recent guests on Bubba the Love Sponge. They spent an hour answering different questions from callers. When asked about Impact going live on March 1 they claimed it wasn't confirmed but said they had read rumors to that effect on the Internet. On going PG, they said that wouldn't happen and will continue to push the envelope each week. When asked about the creative pecking order, Hogan said Russo writes television and then Bischoff "gets an overview of the shit and then he fixes everything." Bischoff put over Desmond Wolfe while Hogan described Abyss as "the next John Cena!" Seriously. Bischoff also buried WWE's Big Show and Jericho, saying he thinks Show is lazy and Jericho wouldn't be able to headline in TNA.

John Cena did a webchat recently on WWE.com. When asked about Hogan and whether he would want to wrestle him down the road, he said: "Yes. I just don't think that's going to happen right now. He's too busy wasting his time."

BBC2 in Wales had a feature on Rob Terry to promote the TNA UK tour. When asked how he got his freaky physique he said he eats a lot of bananas, drinks protein shakes, and trains hard for two hours every day. I guess that's the new magical formula.

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CODY DEANER INTERVIEW

| By PHIL AUSTIN - PhilUK1@aol.com |

The Wrestling Press sat down with a great man who has recently ended a tour with TNA. ODB's favourite redneck Cody Deaner gave us this exclusive interview covering his career thus far, and his plans for the future.

First obvious question: How did you get into pro wrestling?

I got into wrestling when I started training with "Dangerboy" Derek Wylde in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. He opened a gym for some kids that had recently been screwed out of a lot of money by a guy posing to be a wrestling trainer. So, he was gracious enough to help these kids out and start a reputable and affordable school. I was lucky to have started with them.

Did you follow wrestling before? Who inspired you and who trained you?

I've followed wrestling since the age of 5. The only way my mother could get me to sit still when I was younger was to plop me in from of the TV with wrestling on. As a young boy, I was a

I was very happy to have been given a shot with TNA, but I wish I could have been given a shot to show them MORE. I believe that time will come. I believe I'll be back.

Photo ©Lee South - www.LeeSouth.com

Hulkamaniac. So, he inspired me a lot. As I started to understand the business more (once I became a wrestler) I started to become inspired by a lot of different performers – such as Ric Flair, Barry Windham, Jake Roberts, Curt Hennig, Bobby Heenan, Ted DiBiase, Roddy Pipper, Eddie Guerrerro, Chris Benoit and a bunch of guys. I like to "borrow" from a lot of these guys.

Who were some of the other guys that came up with you that have now gone on to bigger and better things in the industry?

Eric Young. He used to teach class every Wednesday at Derek Wylde's wrestling school. I travelled with him early on in my career before he moved on to TNA. He is an amazing performer and just now getting to show the world what he truly has to offer the business.

Shawn Spears. He got a taste of success with WWE and ECW. He wrestled as Gavin Spears on ECW for a while. I'm actually the one that pushed him to send in his first tape to the WWE because I knew he'd get a job out of it. And, I was right. When he's finally given the ball by a major company ... he is going to make himself and whatever company he works for a lot of money.

Tyson Dux. He hasn't really been given a fair shake either. But he has worked for the WWE, TNA, and worked in Japan. He's an amazing talent. Very under-rated and underutilized. I've learned a lot from him travelling the roads with him.

Presumably when you started you didn't go full time as a wrestler. What did you do alongside wrestling and how did you balance both your lives – was it difficult to find enough time to work and train?

Spike TV wouldn't allow me to lay a finger on any of the knockouts during my matches

I trained while I was getting my Bachelor of Arts degree in English Language and Literature. It was sometimes difficult juggling indie shows while studying Shakespeare. Haha. But, in the end, it helped me a lot ... I used my student loan money to pay for my wrestling addiction!

Not many of us would have come across the Hardcore Wrestling Federation before. Tell us a bit about the company you started with, and what was it like plying your trade as a newbie indy worker? Did you get a hard time starting out?

My first match was with HWF. But, they folded shortly after I started with them. I really got my start with Fighting Spirit Pro Wrestling. Which went on to become Neo Spirit Pro Wrestling. We were a bunch of kids that trained together and were hungry. Everybody wanted to have the best match on the show. We were all brothers. And it was amazing. We started to get a cult following in the Niagara area. We once packed 800 people into a little Polish Hall to see Eric Young (pre-TNA) vs. Derek Wylde in a ladder match. It was awesome. It was a great promotion to work for because we all inspired one another and pushed one another to be better.

I wouldn't say I had a hard time starting out. But, I definitely paid my dues. The average person would have found it hard. But, I feel like I was made for this business, so it wasn't "hard" for me. The travelling for no money. Getting beat up by the veterans. Getting ribbed. Setting up rings. That's just part of the business (when you're brought up the right way). And, I'm glad I was brought up the right way.

You had a few WWE tryouts – what happened with these, were you happy with them, and would you now pursue a WWE career again?

I had numerous tryouts with the WWE. My first night there I had a dark match vs. Muhammed Hassan. We had an 8 minute competitive match that went really well. Good enough in fact that I was given the spot to work with Kurt Angle on Smackdown the following night. Which again, went great. I was invited back for more tryouts but was never able to solidify a contract. Eventually I developed the Cody Deaner character, gained the interest of TNA and was able to get a contract with them.

Yes, I would definitely pursue a WWE career again.

SHE'S A GREAT GIRL. BUT, YA ... SHE'S CRAZY! HAHA!

If you had gone to WWE, where would you have seen your character going and who would you have liked to face in-ring?

It's hard to say where a contract with the WWE would have went. I know I have the skills to hang with anyone on their roster. Guys I'd really like to work with are guys like Shawn Michaels, Edge, Chavo, and Christian.

How did you develop the Cody Deaner gimmick?

I looked around at what was popular, and what type of

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characters pop up in movies. The mullet wearing partying redneck guy shows up in a lot of movies. It's a reoccurring character. Also, 80's nostalgia is big. And mullets themselves have a cult following. So, I ran with that and made it my own. The redneck thing has been done in wrestling before. But, never like I do it.

What's the wrestling scene like in Canada these days? Any hot prospects to look out for?

The Canadian wrestling scene is still hot. Especially in Ontario. There are a number of guys that are ready to be on TV and start making money. Guys that deserve it. Guys like Tyson Dux, Derek Wylde, Jake O'Reilly, Crazzy Steve just to name a few. These guys have been ready for years. It's just a matter of them being given the opportunity. Ontario doesn't get a lot of coverage by the wrestling media. Ontario is a literal goldmine for talent if a major company was willing and smart enough to just tap into the resource.

Tell us a bit about GCW. Is it a decent promotion to work for?

GCW is a great promotion to work for. And, it's mainly because of the fans. They run shows out of Oshawa, Ontario. It's a blue collar town with blue collar fans. Which is why I've been able to connect with them. Every time I go back there its like going home. It's like coming home to perform in front of my family. It's awesome.

How did you get a chance with TNA?

It's a long story. The short version is I busted my butt and made sure they saw me. I went to Nashville and Florida every summer for 4 years (on my own dime) before I was signed just so they could get a look at me. I just wanted them to see me. See my look. Get to know me. I got to know a number of people there and started to build a rapport with some of the management. Then, when the opportunity arose and there was an open spot ... I was in their mind because I had made sure they had seen me.

I also had a lot of guys putting a word in for me and trying to get me a job. That's HUGE. Eric Young pushed hard for me because he grew up with me and KNEW that I was good enough to make it on the main stage. Other guys that I've worked with on the indies like Bobby Roode, AJ Styles, Abyss, Kevin Nash ... they all put a word in for me. Which I am very grateful for. When you have those calibre of guys putting a word in for you ... that's a pretty darn good list of references!

Did you feel you got used to the best of your ability in TNA? Were you happy with how you were used, and what would you have liked to have done there if you had the chance?

First off, I am very grateful for the opportunity I was given in TNA and by TNA management. I got to show the wrestling world some of what I have to offer. That being said, I don't feel like I got to show the wrestling world, or TNA, ALL I have to offer.

I didn't get a chance to show the fans and the wrestling world what I really have to offer between the ropes. It's hard to really show what you can do when you are supposed to portray a guy that's a wrestling fan off the street and who

doesn't know how to wrestle. I was very happy to have been given a shot with TNA, but I wish I could have been given a shot to show them MORE. I believe that time will come. I believe I'll be back.

You got hooked up with ODB in TNA straight away. I think a lot of us have a distinct impression of her from her in ring persona, but is she just as wild away from the ring?

Haha. Ya, actually she is. She lives the gimmick! She's a beautiful person. She's a great girl. But, ya ... she's crazy! Haha!

Who did you tend to travel/hang out with during your TNA run?

I hung out a lot with Eric Young because we go way back to when I broke into the business. So, I mostly travelled with him. I also travelled with Bobby Roode. Awesome talent. Awesome guy. As well, I got to travel and spend some time with referee Slick Johnson. He's a character. I also made a lot of other friends there, which made it so hard to leave. But, like I said, I know I'll be back.

WE'VE SEEN THAT HOGAN HAS ALREADY HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT

You wrestled a few mixed matches against the women. Is there ever an awkwardness when wrestling women to 'watch the hands'?

There was no awkwardness as far as that goes, no.

However, there is one thing that made it hard to work with the girls that a lot of people aren't aware of. Because of some things that happened in the media, during my feud with the Knockouts ... Spike TV wouldn't allow me to lay a finger on any of the knockouts during my matches. I couldn't touch them. If you go back and watch those matches (the ones that aired on Spike TV) ... you'll see that I didn't get one offensive maneuver in ... because I wasn't allowed to! Haha. So, that made it kind of hard to have good, believable, and entertaining matches!

But, we made it work. I take pride in my work. I was proud of what we came up with despite having my hands tied (almost literally). I'm proud of what we did because I don't think anyone noticed my hands were tied while those matches were happening. And, I had a lot of people (that knew of the situation) come up to me and compliment me on doing such a good job despite the fact that I wasn't allowed to lay a finger on the girls. It was very rewarding to have a lot of my peers acknowledge my efforts.

What is your opinion on the women's scene as a whole? Do you think that there is enough talent to base a whole show around women's wrestling, or is it just a sideshow attraction still?

The TNA Knockouts Division is the best women's division in the world. Hands down.

Yes, I think there are enough girls, with enough talent, for the women to have a whole show just for themselves. Those girls work really hard. And I know, because I worked with them first hand. I think they have worked hard enough that they have been able to break out of that "sideshow attraction" stereotype and are able to be taken seriously.

There was a lot of criticism when TNA continued to allow unprotected chairshots to the head on their shows. What is your opinion of this in light of the recent concussion issues highlighted?

As far as I know, TNA does NOT allow or encourage unprotected chairshots. TNA cannot stop someone from not protecting themselves. But, the TNA wrestlers are never told not to protect themselves. Quite the opposite. I was always told to protect myself.

As far as the concussion issues ... it's scary. That's why I am very smart when it comes to the kind of risks I take in the ring. I won't take an unprotected chairshot.

Were you disappointed not to be around for the January 4th show?

Yes, I was disappointed not to be a part of the January 4th show. That was a big night for the company and I wish I could have been there and been a part of it. I wish I would have been given the opportunity to show Hogan and Bischoff what I have to offer this business and the company. But, like I have said, I feel like I'll get my shot again.

Which one did you watch: the Bret show or the Hogan show?

I don't have cable (I really am a redneck!), so I didn't get to watch either show live.

Do you think Hogan will make a positive impact (no pun intended) on TNA's future?

I think we've seen that Hogan has already had a positive impact in the ratings with his presence on the show. As for the future? Well, keeping the audience is harder than drawing them in once. Drawing the audience in, and then keeping them is going to be the challenge. But, if anyone knows anything about drawing and keeping an audience, it's Hogan. He's done that his entire career.

I hope for the company, for my friends, for the fans, and for the business as whole – I hope TNA continues to move onward and upward. This business needs a shot in the arm. I hope this is it.

How did your leaving TNA come about? What is Cody Deaner doing now, and what are your plans for the future?

I was told by TNA management that there was no longer any room on the television show for Cody Deaner. There is A LOT of talent in TNA. And A LOT of new faces coming in. And, there is only 2 hours of TV. That's not a lot of TV time. I was a victim of that circumstance.

That being said, I'm regrouping and tweaking some things and I'm looking to show the wrestling world what Cody Deaner really has to offer. I'm in the process of shooting some videos that I will post on Youtube that shows the world exactly what I have to offer. It will be fresh, funny, and entertaining. I'm excited about it.

I'm also getting offers to wrestle all over the world. I'm looking to do some overseas stuff in the new year. And I'm doing indy bookings all over the place.

If promoters want to book me, simply drop me a line at cody_deaner@hotmail.com and we can talk business.

Finally, any word for your fans and supporters worldwide?

Thank you. I have received many emails from fans all over the world saying they miss seeing me on TV. That means a lot to me. Thank you for the support.

In 2010, I'll be bringing some fresh, new things to the table. And, I hope my fans will continue to support me and follow my career.

You haven't seen the last of Cody Deaner on your TV screen.

Oh ya ... and, as always ... Giv'er!!!

To PG or Not to PG

By PWPfrog - froggyllc@aol.com

For months now there have been a few recurring arguments on the humongous amounts of wrestling forums available that just seem determined not to go away, two topics in particular. The first is "I hate Cena" and the second is "Bring Back the Attitude Era."

I usually skip over the "I hate Cena" topics; seriously folks just get over it. If you don't like him, go make a cup of tea while his matches are on for crying out loud. However I am generally tempted to look through threads on those wanting the Attitude Era back.

I have said it many a time that I was a WCW devotee; I refused to acknowledge that there was another federation out there; I was so loyal to WCW that their programming was the only one I would watch. When the Steiner Brothers defected to the WWF as it still was back then, I begrudgingly began to watch, though it was more a case of fast forwarding on the VCR until I got to their segment.

Even when the Radicalz made their first appearance I watched with the sound muted.

See, told you I was loyal to WCW, even during the years of the Disney Tapings!

Due to my absolute reluctance to even attempt to watch a full episode of any WWF / WWE programming I know I missed out on an awful lot of probably classic moments, such as Y2J's first appearance, DX invading the WCW headquarters and so on. I may have seen these now thanks to YouTube but it's not the same as witnessing it at the time.

There is a big division with wrestling fans over whether the attitude era should have continued, or if Vince has killed wrestling by ending it. Reading through all the forums I began to wonder just how much I had really missed by not watching, would I live to regret not taking more notice back then? Do we really need the attitude era back?

And so began some heavy duty trawling from me on the internet, comparing what we see now and what had gone by.

People are forever harping on about Austin vs. McMahon. I am about to alienate possibly the entire readership of TWP now, I love John Cena and think he should remain world champ forever. JUST JOKING! Seriously though, I just don't get the whole Austin loving. True, most people would like to kick their bosses' ass, and unless you want to get fired and never work again, it's just something we will never get to do.

What (see what I just did then? And again) I can never forgive Austin for, or whoever it was, is the creation of the most ANNOYING catchphrase ever! I could just throttle every single person

IF I WANTED A CHILDREN'S ENTERTAINER I'D BOOK COCO THE CLOWN

who chants "what" over and over and over again! It's gone; it's a dead and buried catchphrase! Shut the hell up!

Then we have The Rock. Now, I have only just started to grow a bit of appreciation for him now he's gone. The one match at Wrestlemania X8 that I was probably least looking forward to actually turned out to be one of my favourites, that match of course being The Rock vs. Hulk Hogan. Going to surprise everyone again and admit I am remorseful that I did not follow more of The Rock's matches. I do recall many of his skits and laughing but not so much his actual wrestling. Possibly score one to WWE.

Get ready to hate me again, but, and yes it's a big but, one reason why I truly did not like the attitude era…Mankind, Dude Love, whatever you want to call him. I could not bear him, and still find it hard to maintain interest when he's on the screen. I cried out in dismay when he went to TNA, just as I wanted to start watching that more in depth he bloody shows up, enough to make me hit the off button. I know fans fall at his feet and are hung up on every word he says or writes, yet still, I don't get it. The whole Mr Socko segments, they were not funny, not in the slightest. If I wanted a children's entertainer I'd book Coco the Clown (well, no I wouldn't, I've got a fear of clowns) but you get my point. Back when he was Cactus Jack in WCW, I loved him and his little 'bang bangs' yet what he became just spiralled out of control.

To me, this highlights one of the main problems with wrestling shows, sometimes it's not WWE you're watching, it's more like the Mick Foley show or the Steve Austin show. WCW had its moments too I'll admit, such as the arrival of Hogan for one. Sometimes the writers forget that we do actually want to see wrestling matches.

Probably one of the greatest aspects of the whole attitude era was the fact that WWE had to try new things because at the time there was competition; WCW was still out there and winning the Monday Night Wars. Well, they were until they were bought out by Vince in 2001. A year later we had the "Get the F out" and WWF became the WWE and WCW was now a long distant memory. TNA would emerge at this time but was rarely seen as a threat by Vince. ECW had also filed for bankruptcy so they were also out of the picture. Why try to improve on things if you don't have too, right?

Had any of these revelations so far made me feel that I had still missed out? Not really. Do I think to quote so many fans that "Vince killed wrestling by getting rid of the attitude era"? No, not really. Do I think it may be for the best that he ended the attitude era? Quite frankly, yes.

Which brings us onto the over-riding sub topic on the attitude era threads, was Vince wrong to turn the WWE to a PG rating? Most fans say yes he was (or blame Cena).

Me? Well, do I dare say it? Oh alright then, hell no!

Be honest here, what has he honestly got rid of by making it more family friendly? There is less, if any, blood shed, but so what? Do I really need to see wrestlers streaked with blood to prove that a

move hurt? If you want stuff like that go watch CZW. In this day and age surely lack of blood is for everyone's best interests. Plus if the guys started to blade again we'd just have forums full of "How obvious was so and so blading."

Call me boring now, but I also prefer the guys (and gals) taking less risks. This again was one of the main contentions I had with Jeff Hardy, all the high risk moves he took. Personally it was not enjoyment on my behalf to watch. I would not have felt grateful if a move went wrong and he injured himself no matter how much I may not like him. You can have a fantastic wrestling match without the need for risky manoeuvres; I love nothing better than to see a match with constant near falls so you're on the edge of your seat counting one...Two...Th…oh no his shoulders are up at the last second! I love submission matches too, where you actually get to see the skill of the individual wrestlers. Yes, some high flying moves make it even better, but jumping off cages and scaffolding and ladders that are god knows how high, generally I can do without that thank you very much.

Then there are the storylines which I unfortunately do remember from when I would essentially skim through an episode of WWE, such as H.L.A, Mae Young giving birth to a hand, Katie Vick. Shall I stop now? Entertaining any notion of such angles rising again makes my stomach turn, just as much as it does every time they decide to reprise Goldust. Hopefully we should not expect to see such storylines as these again.

To my horror though things did actually get worse at one point! I came across the whole Al Snow vs. The Big Boss Man skit over Pepper and the Dog Kennel match?!?! I found faith here for my love of WCW saving me from this abomination in the name of wrestling entertainment. What were the writers thinking? Did fans really find this amusing or even worthy of WWE programming?

Being fair, it's not all smelling of roses today though, there are plenty of angles I would gladly get rid of right now, such as the Khali kiss cam, well, Khali in general. The Hog Pen Match for the Miss Wrestlemania crown, CM Punk's chest hair; wait no, loving the chest hair! For sure I would boot the Guest Host on Raw straight out the window; enough is enough, please with these unknown celebs!!!

Yes, it is sport entertainment as Vince loves to keep reminding us, and deep down it has always been PG, they just crossed the line once or twice, ok maybe a bit more. Toning it down was always going to happen at some point, folk are too eager to complain about things they find unsuitable now, and unfortunately these same people are way too happy to sue at the drop of hat - claiming they have been mentally scarred by something they saw, it wouldn't be long before Vince was being named in a law suit for influencing a kid who is not the full pack of cards and acts on something seen in WWE.

So how can we end all the madness on the forums? Personally I don't feel the need for so many threads on bringing back the attitude era. Instead here's a topic for you. How about "Let's have more wrestling and less promo's that take up way more than half of the show?" At the end of the day, isn't that what we supposedly tune in for each and every week?

"Well, I guess hell froze over"

The Impact of Bret Hart

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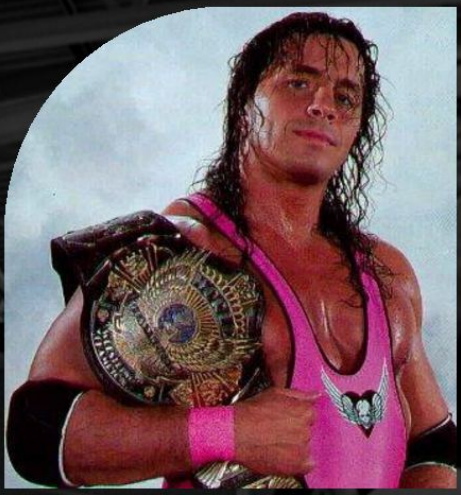
The best there is, the best there was, the best there ever will be. It would seem that never has such a bold statement been so true in the eyes of so many wrestling fans.

Born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada Bret Hart was the eighth child of legendary promoter and wrestler Stu Hart; he was always subjected to wrestling from an early age as his father owned Stampede Wrestling. By age 19 Hart became heavily involved in the promotion and soon was a regular, winning the tag team championships five times, the British Commonwealth Mid-Heavyweight Championship two times and an impressive six time North American Heavyweight Champion.

By 1984 Stampede Wrestling had been sold to the WWF (WWE) and Hart found himself a part of Vince McMahon's vastly expanding empire. At the beginning of his tenure with the company Hart was put together with his brother-in-law Jim 'The Anvil' Neidhart to form the now legendary tag team known as the 'Hart Foundation' - the duo captured the WWF Tag Team Championships on two occasions. But in 1991 it was decided that the team split, Hart flourished as a singles competitor he went onto have two reigns as the Intercontinental Champion as well as holding the WWF Championship on no less than 5 occasions.

HART SPAT IN MCMAHON'S FACE AND PUNCHED THE OWNER OF THE COMPANY

Much has been wrote about the now infamous 'Montreal Screw job' and twelve long years have now passed by since that fateful day on November 9th 1997 when Vince McMahon dared to do the unthinkable. Hart's contract was running out and the WWF's war with their bitter rivals WCW was at fever pitch, McMahon had consented that Hart seek employment with WCW.



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With the Survivor Series coming up Hart had a clause in his contract that gave him creative freedom over the last thirty days he worked for the WWF, with him leaving the company a plan agreed by Hart and McMahon was seemingly in place for the title to be dropped the night after the Survivor Series on Monday Night Raw.

In an incident that will forever live in the memory of any wrestling fan McMahon decided that he could not allow the possibility of Hart leaving for WCW with the Heavyweight Championship. Breaking his word McMahon switched the result of the match and had referee Earl Hebner call for the bell early while Hart was in the Sharpshooter, Michaels regained the title and the night ended with a heated altercation in which Hart spat in McMahon's face and punched the owner of the company backstage.

Over the years Hart has commented quite openly about his disdain for Vince McMahon, WWE, what happened in Montreal and Shawn Michaels.

"As for Vince, I'll forever appreciate what he did for me. I wish I could say that we learned a lesson from our encounters that cheaters never prosper. Sadly cheaters do prosper and even

become billionaires. The world's full of them, and maybe that's why we need heroes who don't gauge success with dollars.

Hart added: *"I did get inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame, and Vince gave me creative control over an anthology of my career - but it took eight years after the Montreal screw job."*

When speaking about Shawn Michaels, Hart has stated: "*To me, Shawn will always be a phony, a liar, and a hairless yellow dog. The difference between Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels is that I'd have never done to him, or to any of the boys, what he did to me.*"

It has been shown as time has passed that McMahon and Hart have had a working agreement with each other resulting in the 2005 DVD compilation detailing the career of Hart and in 2006 WWE inducted Hart into the Hall of Fame, while Hart appeared at the ceremony he chose not to attend Wrestlemania the next day.

In early 2009 Hart stated about a possible return. "*I try to cooperate with them (WWE) when I can, I think it's good to be on better terms with them (WWE), but I have no plans at all to appear on any TV show or pay per view for them, ever. I don't ever want to be in a position where I have to work and actually expect to make a check from them or contract. I've already made a contract with them that they broke, and I don't think you can really do business with them after that. I don't want to be a character in wrestling at all. I don't want to do that again anymore.*"

It's amazing how later that same year that comment was made, it was announced that Hart had signed a short deal which would see him with WWE until after Wrestlemania XVI.

January 4th 2010 will be known in the history books as the potential start of the Monday night wars part II, TNA presented a special three hour edition of Impact which debuted opposite Monday Night Raw.

WWE were smart enough to realise was the only way they could combat the huge anticipation for the TNA programme and Hulk Hogan's impending debut was to give the fans what they wanted, and that was to once again see the 'Hitman' step into a WWE ring.

Going into the January 4th show there was seemingly so many possibilities WWE could have done with the Bret Hart returning angle. What would happen when he

To me, Shawn will always be a phony, a liar, and a hairless yellow dog. The difference between Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels is that I'd have never done to him what he did to me

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and Michaels appear on screen together and similarly when McMahon and Hart appeared on screen together?

It made for an exciting prospect and the return gave Monday Night Raw a new energy and coupled with TNA presenting IMPACT! on the same night, it gave a sense of electricity and excitement that has rarely been in wrestling since 2001.

The opening of Raw was one of the most heartfelt moments that WWE have presented in the past few years; it was something that nobody ever thought they would see, Hart and Michaels finally buried the hatchet in a memorable and genuinely emotional segment.

Having Hart return felt fresh even though it is a subject that has been debated greatly, while the incident from Montreal in 1997 was brought up throughout the show it was the closing segment that brought the story into 2010 and gave WWE a distinct direction with where they wanted to go with the return of the 'Hit man'.

McMahon seemingly wanted to bring closure to the whole 'Montreal Screw job' as did Hart, he said that he saw Bret while he was a young man as the future, he gave Hart opportunity and he really did become "The excellence of execution". McMahon announced Stu Hart being inducted into this year's Hall of Fame ceremony and he extended his hand to which Hart shook it.

McMahon then lifted Hart's arm in celebration but then kicked him in the groin, it was a perfect way to continue the feud.

McMahon stated on the following Raw that "Hart would never be seen in a WWE ring again." Has the chairman of the WWE brought about his own closure to the saga and will the chairman get what he wants?

This storyline seems far from over and it is interesting as to where the WWE go from here, Hart has neither confirmed nor denied his ability to wrestle when asked for comments over recent weeks. It would seem unlikely after his stroke in 2002 that the 'Hit man' would step back into the squared circle, the more likely possibility would see an angle like McMahon did with billionaire Donald Trump a few years ago. This would involve Hart and McMahon choosing representatives to wrestle for them. WWE could also go with Hart joining up with the Hart dynasty to elevate and help them become bigger stars, maybe a feud with DX - Triple H and Shawn Michaels somewhere down the line could be on the cards.

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For now Hart's involvement with WWE is still unknown and in the coming weeks it will be revealed about what will happen, but what does seem clear is that the WWE is building towards some sort of McMahon - Hart showdown and it looks set to happen at the grandest stage of them all - Wrestlemania XXVI.

WCW

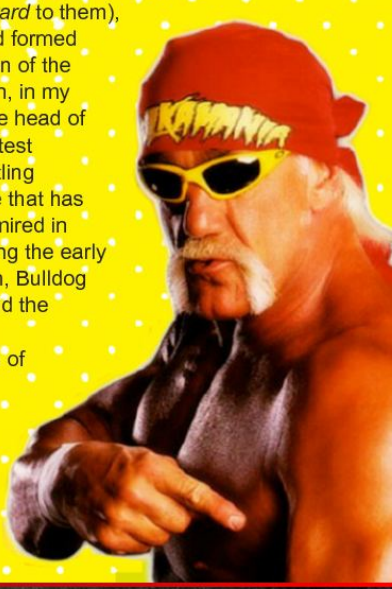
ONE NIGHT STAND

| By JOHN ATKINS - johnatkinsiii@yahoo.com |

Monday January 4th 2010 saw the return – if only for one night – of the Monday night wars. While WWE were offering up the return of Bret Hart for the first time in over a decade, TNA presented something far more… interesting. While the jury is still out on quite what that show might mean in the long-term, John Atkins sat back and enjoyed it in a different way. As someone who lamented the loss of wrestling on the Turner networks all too greatly, this was his very own…WCW One Night Stand!

I'll be the first to admit: I was sceptical about Hulk Hogan signing with TNA. From my perspective, it looked like a broken-down Hulkster needed a quick payday following his recent divorce, and had convinced another clueless money mark to open her chequebook. I never forgave Hogan and his nWo cronies for their part in the demise of WCW, and while I'm not a *huge* fan of TNA, I felt sorry for those fans who were invested in it, about to watch their beloved company go the same way.

On the other hand, Bret Hart's last run in the WWF had been one of the most enjoyable moments in my wrestling puberty. While I'd taken a while to warm to him (like Benoit, I'd always *enjoy* his matches, but rarely *look forward* to them), by the time he'd formed the 1997 version of the Hart Foundation, in my eyes he was the head of one of the greatest stables in wrestling history. A stable that has since become mired in tragedy, following the early deaths of Owen, Bulldog and Pillman, and the unfortunate sphericalisation of Jim Neidhart.



The events that went down in Montreal on Hart's

last night in the company led to *years* of speculation and debate, and meant that his legacy would always be incomplete.

So when I heard about *his* signing – returning to the WWE for a 3-month programme culminating at Wrestlemania – my feelings were exactly the opposite.

Whilst Hogan would no doubt be bleeding TNA dry, humiliating and burying those who had worked there for the last 7 years, and filling up the roster with his decrepit buddies like the Honky Tonk Man and Brutus Beefcake, Hart would be involved in a storyline that would be compelling, exciting, steeped in reality, and with a guaranteed blow-off at the Granddaddy of them all. On top of that, Hart, well aware of his own physical limitations, would almost certainly keep his in-ring activity to a minimum, and use his spotlight to expose some of the currently under-utilised young stars in the WWE.

Whilst there was an almost depressing inevitability about Hogan leeching onto TNA, Bret Hart returning to the WWE was something I thought we would *never* see.

And so on Tuesday 5th, I raced home to watch both shows, RAW, of course, first. I honestly don't think I'd been so excited about anything in wrestling since Wrestlemania X-Seven.

Two hours later, I was left feeling distinctly underwhelmed. I believe my exact words were, "Is that it?" Aside from an *awesome* new version of his entrance music – perhaps my favourite since JBL's Longhorn – the rest of the show was very, very dull. 'Meh' just about sums it up, I think. The segment with Michaels at the beginning started off promisingly, but resolving their issues so quickly was very unsatisfactory. A brief backstage skit with Jericho, and then a confrontation with Vince at the end of the show that was so dull fans were streaming out of the arena, did not fill me with hope for the killer angle I was hoping for.

No rub given to younger wrestlers. An increasingly muted response from the live audience. And no build to a future angle, or even mention of any return date whatsoever.

As for the rest of the show? Dire. Absolutely dull as dishwater. And if you're in any doubt as to how weak the WWE RAW roster is right now, and how much trouble they're going to be in if they don't make some *serious* changes soon, check out the *Bret Hart after Raw 1-4-10* video on Youtube. They need to make some *serious* changes.

And so it was with a heavy heart that I fired up TNA Impact, not hopeful, but at least curious as to what they might deliver. And aware that they would be pulling out all the stops for this one, I'd stayed spoiler-free by avoiding the internet for the previous 48 hours, no mean feat, I can tell you.

And I will say this for them straight away – they certainly know how to make the most out of not very much. If you've ever been to the Impact Zone in person, you'll know it's far from spacious – just one of the many reasons why I thought Hogan would never be seen dead there. I interviewed Mick Foley several years back, and he said that when he turns up on an indy show, people think he's 'keeping it real', when Hogan turns up on one, you assume he must owe someone some serious cash.

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But this show started well. I remember watching Foley's Impact debut and feeling more than a little embarrassed for him that you could clearly hear and make out the dozen or so raucous fans chanting, "He's hardcore! He's hardcore!" and the general audience apathy to his promo, when just weeks earlier he'd been a part of the biggest wrestling show on earth.

And in fairness to the Florida fans, they were psyched for this one. And it's amazing how important fan response is to the perception of the TV audience. They were going for it. But would the show deliver?

Things did not start well, as Taz introduced his "new broadcast colleague… and close, personal friend of the Hulkster", right-wing shock-jock, Bubba the Love Sponge, for comments from fans on what they want to see from the new TNA. Amongst the highlights were a man who wanted to see Hulk Hogan against Andre the Giant (not sure that's going to happen), a possibly homeless man with a TNA tattoo (seriously), and a clearly drunk frat girl who wanted to see "blood, chairs on the head, all that good stuff." Ok…

Bubba, looking like Bono if his face had melted and he'd turned to comfort eating to make up for the collapse of his musical career, offered nothing to the segments, other than a leery old pervert vibe. But if his role was contained to interviewing hyper fans, I guess I could live with that. We would see…

The opening bout was an 8-man elimination cage match where apparently the only way to win was to climb through a hole in the top of the centre of the cage. Think about that for a while. I wish someone at TNA had.

Out first were the Motor City Machine Guns. Some of their backstage segments with Foley last year, when they were a reluctant part of The Front Line (remember them?) made me think they had the charisma and potential to be the next Edge and Christian. But for some reason, whenever they actually step in the ring, they have all the presence of a pair of rehearsing ballerinas. Still, a chance to impress in front of a new, and potentially huge audience.

Lethal Consequences were also in the match. Consequences Creed has a fantastic look, and is hugely charismatic, but Jay Lethal… Well, I get that he's doing a Macho Man gimmick, but to me he looks like a grown man wearing a shower curtain. Not quite sure what to make of him.

Suicide was great for the short period when he was played by Christopher Daniels briefly, last year. Somehow Daniels has far more charisma when masked (see also: Man, Curry). Unfortunately, now he's once again played by the injury-prone Frankie Kazarian, the character is less interesting.

The match starts, and as much as I am keen to give TNA the benefit of the doubt, there are problems straightaway. For a start, the thick red bars of the steel cage mean anything less than an extreme close-up is almost impossible to see. And with 8 wrestlers in the ring, it's almost impossible to follow anyway.

Homicide takes out a baton, and begins to clean house. Tenay brings the tautology "That

extendable baton – he's using it as a weapon!" And the fans groan as one, as a supposedly wild and crazy, anything goes cage match ends… in a disqualification.

Then things become awkward. Homicide, having 'lost' the match, decides to climb up the cage, presumably to climb out of the top for the 'moral' victory. Unfortunately for him, he must not have worn down his opponents' energy meters enough, because no matter how many times he presses L2, he just can't seem to climb up the cage and escape out the top.

Even watching again now, I want the ground to swallow me up. On a regular show, I presume they'd cut to a commercial, and the snafu would be edited out. Unfortunately for Homicide, the show is live, and he needs to get out of the cage somehow, because it leads to…

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT ELSE THEY PULL OUT OF THE BAG....

…the return of one of the WWE's biggest stars of the last decade, and most Google'd wrestler of 2009 – Jeff Hardy! Wow. I did not see that coming! Poor old Homicide has to drop down to the ring, and squeeze through one of the holes in the side of the cage, as the TNA braintrust didn't see fit to put in a door.

I can't quite articulate how weird it is seeing Jeff Hardy – a WWE champion 3 times in the last 12 months – turning up in TNA. For a midcard feud with Homicide. We'll see where they go with this, as Hardy obviously has his well-documented legal issues, but I honestly haven't been shocked by a move like this since the height of the first Monday night wars. TNA clearly mean business with this show, and I now can't wait to see what else they pull out of the bag, if this is just the first 20 minutes.

Sadly, for every one cool thing they do, they follow it up with something equally asinine. After the break, we see Jeff Hardy coming through the curtain backstage to be greeted by… long-time jobber Shannon Moore, giving him a slow handclap. I'm pretty sure if Kurt Angle came back to RAW next Monday, he wouldn't spend his time hanging out with Jimmy Wang Yang.

Still, onwards and upwards. Shots of the Hulkster's motorcade approaching the building, and I am getting almost misty-eyed with nostalgia for his 1994 Disneyland ticker-tape parade.

A reasonable women's match later, and we once again cut to the back. A limo is here. But it's not Hulk. It's Ric Flair! Again, I wasn't expecting that! As much as it had been rumoured, I was convinced that Flair would be back in the WWE sooner or later. Flair shakes hands with Beer Money Inc, a referee, and six or seven random backstage helpers who just seem to be wandering by. Still, Flair is here! Yes, he hasn't done or said anything, but still – it's Flair! Flair, Hardy, Hogan on the way… and an interview with Nash revealing that Hogan "is not coming alone". This is a night of surprises… And I'm starting to get a feeling of déjà vu…

Following Foley being refused entry to the building, due to the new management fearing he may be a disruptive influence on the proceedings, we go back inside and see Bobby Lashley being led to the ring by his wife Krystal. Now in my opinion, Lashley leaving WWE was one of the best things that could have happened… to the WWE. The man just has zero charisma.

As he stood in the ring trying his best to look intimidating, he let his wife do the talking. And all I could think of was that his career at this stage could probably be summed up by one sound: that of a whip being cracked.

Krystal demanded Lashley's immediate release from TNA so he could concentrate more on his burgeoning MMA career, and I for one was hoping he was going to get it. He can't wrestle (for fear of getting injured before his 'real'

fights), can't talk, and just looks utterly lost inside the ring and on TV. Get rid!

Backstage, the Beautiful People are gearing up for a night of strip poker. "So when we lose… everyone wins", purrs Velvet Sky. It's unlikely we'll see anything we haven't seen before, but hey, it could be pretty enjoyable, and some pretty crazy stuff went down in the original Monday night wars, so it should be worth keeping an eye on. That said, with the internet at my fingertips, the fact that I have now actually seen and touched real-life naked women, and the fact that I'm not a hormonally-charged 15 year-old any more, the promise of TVPG nudity isn't quite the draw it once was.

Still, no time to waste as outside…Scott Hall and Sean "123 Kid/Syxx/X-Pac/Syxx-Pac" Waltman are hanging about. But their name's not on the list, so they can rough up all the security guards they like, but they're not coming in.

Now again, I'm not a huge fan of Hall, Nash and Waltman. I genuinely resent the countless opportunities they've been given due to their friendships with Hogan, and political manipulations. They destroyed WCW. They were a car-wreck in their 2002 WWE run, and have added nothing to the table everywhere they've popped up since. Hall was in TNA less than a year ago and he lasted one night! But still they get treated like royalty. I don't like them.

However, I am now no longer watching this show as part of a weekly episodic series. No. With Hall, Nash, Waltman, Flair, Hogan on the way, and a bunch of faceless cruiserweights nearly killing themselves, I've finally worked out what this show reminds me of.

This isn't TNA Impact. This is WCW One Night Stand! And like the ECW show of the same name, you don't quite know what you're going to see next, but you know there'll be some more familiar faces who sure, aren't quite what they once were, but hey, it's good to see them again.

I sit back now and enjoy the show. Waltman and Hall have somehow scored front row tickets. Hogan's 45-minute limo ride is over, and it's time for the moment we thought we'd never see – the Hulkster hits the Impact Zone! And the response is staggering.

It's weird. You'd think it would be sad seeing Hogan in such a small-time setting. But somehow, instead of dragging Hulk down, Hulk seems to lift TNA up. He really does make it seem important.

Hogan, Nash, Hall and Waltman are in the ring, and the band are back together. Unfortunately, they're suffering from creative differences, so in comes their Brian Epstein – aka Easy E, Eric Bischoff.

Bischoff, now with white hair and a black leather jacket, has finally completed his 15-year transformation from Dirk Benedict to George Peppard.

And things get a bit weird… Hogan and Bischoff re-emphasise that whether you're "the janitor or the world champion", you're going to be under a microscope, and will have to earn your spot in the company. What, with a mop-and-bucket-on-a-pole match?

But then Bischoff asks for a 'format' (i.e. running order, i.e. script) and tears it up. "That's what you *thought* you were going to do…" pulling a new format from his pocket, "but this is what we're *going* to do! Pass this on to your director!"

Now what is this supposed to mean? Even if Bischoff is for some reason acknowledging that wrestling is a heavily scripted form of entertainment (and I'm not entirely sure he is), how is giving out a new script half way through a show going to work?

If a theatre director is unhappy with a play, he doesn't hand out new scripts halfway through, as how would the actors read them? Will the rest of the wrestlers come out reading from their new 'format'. Do Tenay and Taz get a copy?

As Hogan and Bischoff leave the ring, the camera pans up to Sting, revisiting his rafter-dwelling character of the late 90s. Was that part of the old format? Or had someone managed to bustle Sting through makeup and up the stairs in the 30 seconds or so since Bischoff had handed over the new script?

It's stupid stuff like that which made WCW such a mind-screw the first time round. I *know* Coronation Street isn't real, but I don't expect the producer to appear after the adverts and tell Peter Barlow, "This is what you *thought* you were doing…". I want to be able to suspend *some* of my disbelief…

That said, Sting up in the rafters, and the feeling of nostalgia and warmth continues to grow. As utterly insane and nonsensical as it might be, it's nothing if not enjoyable.

There follows a women's tag match with the tasty Taylor Wilde, who I've sort of had a bit of a thing for, ever since she played the drums on an episode of Impact about a year ago. I can't explain it, I'm afraid.

It's actually a pretty decent bout, but I'm curious to see what happens next. Like with ECW One Night Stand, good as it may have been, the in-ring action was largely secondary to the ongoing storylines of the night.

And we are not disappointed. Returning to the backstage area, we rejoin the Beautiful People's strip poker game… yet, somehow they are all still fully dressed. I begin to think of the myriad of flaws with this segment, including their basic lack of knowledge of the rudimentary rules of poker, when a familiar voice is heard.

"Hello ladies…" he is very careful NOT to say. Yes, the man formerly known as Val Venis is in the Impact Zone. Or as Velvet Sky diplomatically calls him, "Mr. Towel Man" Not quite on the scale of Flair or Hardy from earlier, but an enjoyable cameo, nonetheless.

Elsewhere, Foley is still trying to get in the building, without much luck. And behind him… The Nasty Boys are back! Now I mentioned that one of my fears was Hogan's ancient cronies taking over the show, but now I'm watching this in the frame of mind of a demented alternate-reality one-off WCW reunion, I'd be disappointed if Knobbs and Saggs *weren't* on the show!

Morgan and Hernandez destroy Dr. Stevie and Raven in record time. Raven pulls off a trick perfected by both Bob Holly and Bull Buchanan of somehow being bald, while simultaneously having a full head of hair. And Stevie Richards has taken to wrestling in his pyjamas. Still, the match lasts less than a minute, so we can get backstage and back to the mayhem.

And mayhem it truly is, as Pope D'Angelo Dinero – the former Elijah Burke – shows that WWE really dropped the ball with him, in an interview with Christy Hemme. The man can really talk. That said, at the moment, in my opinion, he is coming off a little bit like a poor man's Rock, and needs to develop his own style more. Nonetheless, it's an enjoyable interview until a rather unwelcome interview from…

…Orlando Jordan. Ok, as surprises go, this is probably more akin to the botched Danny Doring & Roadkill interview rather than the surprise return of Masato Tanaka, but still. Jordan is also holding a bottle of something which I *believed* to be MamaJuana, and continually looking nervously offscreen. After everything that has already gone down, I am more than half-expecting JBL to appear.

No such luck, sadly, but the segment reaches new levels of unintentional hilarity as Jordan claims that he and Hogan go way back, and that Pope reminds him of himself. Just what the world was waiting for. An Elijah Burke v Orlando Jordan feud…

But that'll have to wait for another day, because tonight, the Pope has his hands full with the former-Nigel McGuinness, Desmond Wolfe. And poor old Nigel goes down quickly to His Holiness, which must be somewhat troubling, considering he's just had two very critically acclaimed matches with Kurt Angle in the last couple of months.

And Jarrett's back! And Rhino's been attacked! This really is car-crash TV at its finest. Sure, there's an incredible amount going on, I don't know if I could deal with it every week, but after seeing how stale RAW has become, I'll take this every time.

AJ Styles hypes up his match with Kurt Angle at Genesis. Yes, the man can get the job done in the ring, but in interviews, promos and backstage confrontations, he looks like a constipated 8 year-old. Supposedly Hogan and Bischoff have said they want to work with him so that a year from now, he's not just a great athlete, but a superstar outside of the ring. All I'll say is: they've got their work cut out for them.

Bischoff decides that the match with Kurt Angle won't be taking place at the PPV – it'll be taking place right here, later tonight. And unlike in the old early-90s editions of Worldwide, where they'd say, "We don't have to wait for the pay-per-view, we can settle this right now!" I think we actually *will* see this match later. And it should be a great showcase for Styles and Angle.

Out front, Jarrett is in the ring, and cuts one hell of a pro-TNA promo, with the fans are solidly behind him. He puts over the young talent, the company, Hogan, and it's just a really nice, heartfelt speech. This is one of the areas (perhaps the only area)

where WWE could actually take a leaf out of TNA's book. Stop giving guys promos scripted word-for-word, and just let them *talk*. Tell them what you want them to get across, tell them roughly how much time they've got to say it in, and let them *say it*.

Anyway. In a slightly weird, and hugely misjudged moment (the reaction to which was apparently edited out of subsequent replays), Hogan begins belittling Jarrett for his accomplishments, telling him that he's restructured the company so that Jarrett's now no longer a partner, and telling him to get in line and lace up his boots. "Now the young guys are going to get a REAL push, brother!" From the sublime to the ridiculous…

I swear this show is the craziest thing I've ever seen. Poor old Jarrett. Last time he appeared on Monday night, he was sacked by Vince on Raw. Eight years later, and he's kicked out of his own company by Hogan. The man just can't catch a break.

Christopher Daniels is backstage being interviewed. As I've said earlier, put the man under a mask, and he somehow exudes charisma. But in his street clothes he looks like a slightly flamboyant snooker player. By the looks of things, Bischoff and Hogan think the same, as his interview time is cut short after seven seconds by a troubled Jeremy Borash, who is being hounded on his phone by Mick Foley, still trying to get into the building. Which he does, overpowering JB, explaining that "he has a bone to pick with Hogan".

In a happier place, Jeff Hardy is hanging out backstage with Shannon Moore, finishing off a self-portrait. After all, what better way to relax after a scuffle with Homicide than to bust out an easel and canvas?

Abyss versus Samoa Joe. Abyss is still a Mankind rip-off. I don't 'get' Samoa Joe. He's apparently the 'submission machine', but looks like a 1980s prelim-boxer. How does that work? Still, he defeats, 'the Monster', and life goes on.

There follows another weird segment. I should really have copied that sentence to the clipboard, so I could just press Ctrl+V every few lines. Bischoff is going over his format with a director, and says, "Do me a favour. That segment's running just a little bit long. Let's reformat it."

What does that even mean? Seriously? If he's talking about a match, then surely, as a 'legitimate sporting contest', a mere director will have no bearing whatsoever on how long it lasts? If he's talking about one of the backstage segments, well, these are all being presented as spontaneous occurrences, tonight at least, so again, what does the director have to do with how long they last? And if he's talking about an in-ring interview, shouldn't he be telling the wrestlers themselves to try and speed things up a little?

WHAT BETTER WAY TO RELAX AFTER A SCUFFLE THAN TO BUST OUT AN EASEL AND CANVAS?

Is he talking about the segment they are currently in? Because sorry, Marty, I'm just having a little trouble thinking fourth-dimensionally. I'm not used to having to get my head around Einstein's Theory of Relativity just to enjoy a wrestling show…

I sort of like what Bischoff's trying to do, but if you stop and think about it for just an eighth of a second, it doesn't make a lick of sense.

Talking of things that make no sense… Krystal is back, and she's still demanding Lashley's release. Bischoff tells her to drop the attitude. The gist of the segment is: Krystal: "I want Lashley's release". Bischoff: "No". Krystal, "Fine, we're leaving".

So if Lashley *doesn't* get his release, he's leaving? Ok…

Still, the segment gets the thumbs-up from me, if only because it features the immortal

exchange: Krystal: “So, aren’t you going to say anything?” Bischoff: “I don’t know – want a mint?” More confectionary needs to be offered in wrestling.

Elsewhere, Beer Money have been attacked. I wonder if the director feels this segment is running long?

The Nasty’s are still trying to get in, and having no luck, until Bubba schmoozes with security and they sneak in behind him.

Angle is backstage, warming up. If anyone in the States had turned over from RAW, I don’t think they’d have been surprised to see he was still wrestling since leaving WWE, I think they’d be surprised to see he’s lost about one third of his body mass, and almost all of his definition.

In the parking lot, the hottest wrestler on the planet, Jeff Hardy, is mobbed. By THREE teenage girls. Wow, what a superstar…

Apparently the Dudleys… sorry Team 3D, the Deadly Brothers, have their own dressing room at the Impact Zone. And as they’re in Japan, the Nasty’s decide to claim it as their own, and wreck the place. In a nice touch, the security men who previously refused to let them in bring them a box of donuts to apologise, and the Nasty Boys throw them back in their face. Then pick them up off the floor and eat them anyway. Charming.

Main event time, and I guess the idea is that those fed up with RAW’s winning formula of divas & midget-related fun, will switch over and see some top-drawer grappling action.

Styles and Angle put on a good match, spoiled only slightly by the slipshod placement of commercial breaks, and a distracting cameo by Ric Flair, who it’s hinted at is going to be a mentor figure to AJ Styles. Which I assume means he’ll turn on him within the month…

This is actually an important match for AJ. Not only will it be seen by perhaps the biggest TV audience he’s ever wrestled in front of, but the result will prove whether Bischoff and Hogan are serious about their commitment to him, or want to reset the belts, and put them on a ‘safe pair of hands’ like Angle.

Remarkably, it’s the former, as Styles wins the match and retains the championship after a 30+ minute match. Quite brave programming by TNA and I hope it pays off for them.

However, there’s still 4 minutes left, so here’s Hogan once again, to put over Angle and AJ, and tell the fans once again that TNA is going places. Except he’s interrupted by a stagehand, who tells him something that causes him to abandon his promo and waddle off backstage in a hurry.

But what could the stagehand be telling him?

If he’s telling him that Mick Foley has got past security and is somewhere in the building, then either a) why didn’t he tell him at some point in the last 45 minutes? Or b) wait another 2 and a

half minutes, and tell him once they're off-air, so as to avoid marring a potentially historic speech by Hogan?

But if he's telling him that Foley is backstage and on his way to tear up Hogan's office, then that seems a bit odd because when we cut immediately backstage…Foley is still looking for Hogan's office. Not only that, but on his way, he busts in on the game of strip poker, and in THREE HOURS, not ONE person has lost ONE item of clothing. And "Mr Towel Man" only had a towel, to begin with!

"In case you hadn't noticed, you're interrupting something pretty damn special, here!" the former Venis tells Foley. I'll say, it's the world's least titillating game of strip poker. Somehow, despite having been with the company less than three hours, Venis knows his way around the backstage area better than Foley, and directs him to Hogan's office.

Once again, the Aristotelian principles of time are stretched to their fullest extent, as despite having stopped for the leisurely *tête à tête* with Val, he's still beaten a sprinting Hulk Hogan back to the office.

Instead, Foley finds Bischoff who tells him that, like Jarrett, his contract has been restructured, he's no longer a shareholder in the company, and if he wants to stay in TNA, he'll have to get in line and prove himself. Foley responds that he'd made a vow to himself that he would never work for Eric Bischoff again, and if he was going to get fired, he'd give Bischoff a reason to fire him – he'd knock his teeth down his throat.

Sadly for Mick, an nWo beatdown ensues, and Foley is left lying. As we go off the air, Hogan – who doesn't appear to be in danger of breaking any land-speed records any time soon – arrives, and gives an ambiguous snort, setting up…

…Who knows what?

Not me, that's for sure, but I can honestly say that was one of the most fun 3 hours I've had watching wrestling in years. I don't know where it's going from here, I don't know if I can stand watching it every single week, I don't know if we'll see Hardy again, I don't know if Scott Hall will make it to next week's Impact tapings, let alone the PPV, and I don't know what any of this means for upcoming PPV buyrates and TV ratings.

Lots of it didn't make sense, or was stupid, or pushed my suspension of disbelief to its very limits. But somehow, tonight – for one night only – it didn't matter. Because I wasn't watching TNA.

In my head, I was watching WCW One Night Stand.

©Tony Knox

Team Blossom

Interview: DARREN WOOD - dtwooduk@hotmail.com
Photos: TONY KNOX - www.tonyknox.org.uk

What made you decide to get into the Wrestling business? Was there a defining moment?

We started watching wrestling when we were 12 and it just captivated us and everything from then on involved wrestling, it would be all we talked about. We wouldn't say there was a defining moment, we enjoyed it and it was such a big part of our lives that we didn't want to and didn't think about doing anything else.

Favourite wrestlers to watch growing up?

When we first started watching it our favourite was Triple H, we then got hooked on the Hardy Boyz and that was it. We wanted to be like them and they became huge inspirations to us. We were also big fans of Trish Stratus too.

How did training from El Ligero and SAS come about?

We had been training with Futureshock wrestling for around a year and a half and then met El Ligero at a show. We wanted to start training at different places so we could learn from different people and further our wrestling skills and after having met him, El Ligero started working with us and introduced us to the guys at SAS wrestling and from there we started focusing on other aspects of wrestling that were previously unknown to us.

What was the hardest part of training?

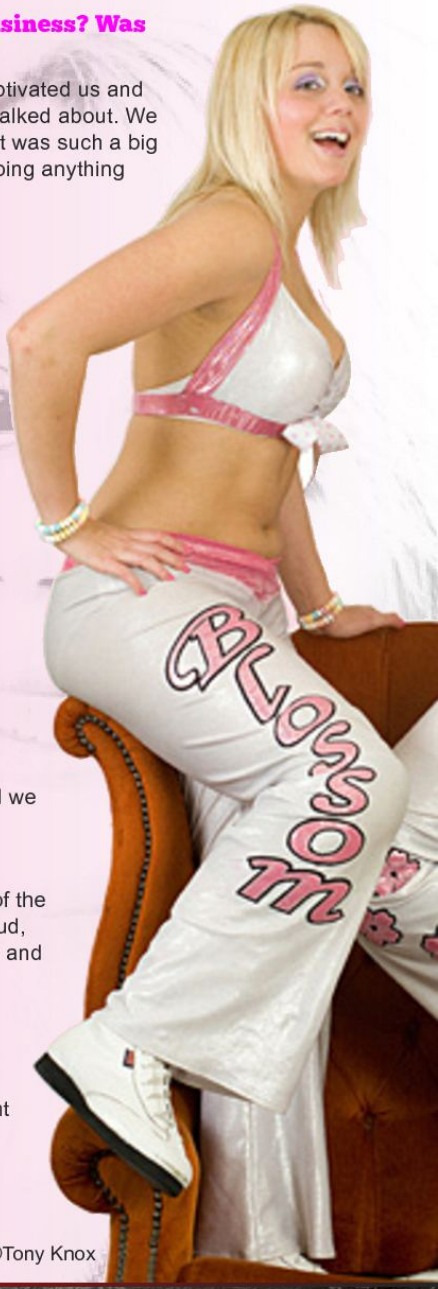
Our toughest challenge when training was attempting to run before we could walk at times. It takes time to learn things and we would get very frustrated if we didn't get things straight away.

Anybody of note train with you?

Through training at SAS we got to watch and learn from a lot of the top guys in British wrestling such as Dave Moralez/Mastiff, Spud, Jack Storm, Luke Phoenix, Bubblegum, El Ligero, Joey Hayes and Danny Hope.

How did going to the US to work for OVW come about?

We attended a training seminar with Nick Dinsmore (Eugene) when he was in the UK and he asked us if we had ever thought about going to OVW to further our wrestling knowledge. It had always been something we wanted to do but he really gave us the encouragement to get planning and make it happen.



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Becoming the OVW Women's champion must be an honour for you?

There have been some extremely talented people who have held the OVW Women's Title, girls who we have enjoyed watching and learning from, so of course it's an honour to have our names added to that list.

Is there a bigger incentive for you now after winning the Women's title to follow in the footsteps of people like Beth Phoenix?

It definatley inspires us and adds to the motivation we have to work hard and learn as much as we can so we can gain the skills and knowledge to be the best that we can be and to have the success that someone as talented as Beth Phoenix has had.

What's the difference to being trained by El Ligero to working with the trainers at OVW?

El Ligero was able to teach us the basics and we learnt a lot but you can't really compare that to learning from Rip Rogers. He knows so much that it is impossible not to learn from him. We are really grateful and so excited to be in a position to listen and watch him and are taking

in as much as we can. We have also been able to learn from Mike Mondo who was a massive help and support in helping us sharpen up and improve our basic fundamentals and also teach us so much more.

What are the facilities like at OVW?

The facilities at OVW are fantastic, the set up is very professional and they have everything you need to facilitate your learning.

It must be quite a harrowing experience working for OVW knowing that such great talent was produced there?

We were definitely a little nervous at first, it was quite daunting to think of all the great talent that came out of OVW, we definately wanted to push ourselves and work hard. But everyone at OVW is very supportive of each other and helps each other so it's also a lot of fun and it's more inspiring than anything else to think about the people that came before us.

Is it a massive difference working matches for a TV show than working a match at a non televised event?

There is a difference, TV matches are very much geared towards the cameras but it is the production crew that have to be more concered about that. Non televised events tend to be smaller in production so they have a completely different feel to them.

Is it difficult working for multiple companies seeing different people in the locker room?

No, it's lots of fun getting to work for different promotions as it's always nice to meet new people and is something we really enjoy about wrestling.

Is there a lot of research that goes into agreeing to work for a company promoter before appearing for them?

There isn't too much to research as you usually find out what a lot of promotions are like through friends in the business.

Do you get a lot of creative freedom from companies?

It depends on the company a lot of the time but from our experience we have always been encouraged to think of ideas for ourselves, which is something we really have fun doing and enjoy!

Do you feel that UK wrestling companies need to bring in US talent to sell out shows?

It's always fun when shows have a variety of different wrestlers so if promoters can bring over American talent then that can be exciting for the English crowds and it also allows the English wrestlers to learn from the US wrestlers and vice versa.

WWE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DREAM OF OURS SINCE WE WERE LITTLE

Do you believe there should be of board of control for British Wrestling, I mean anyone can become a promoter and start promoting shows, do you think there should be a need for a license of some sort?

We think that would be beneficial to stop just anyone being a promoter, it would mean that fans would be able to go to a show and hopefully get the best product and watch people who are well trained and know what they are doing.

Greatest match matches to date? Also your thoughts on them?

We have loved getting the opportunity to wrestle Josie/Sojourner Bolt as she is a very tough opponent and extremely talented so she always makes us work harder. So although we would have been happier with different outcomes of the matches, both our match at Thanksgiving Thunder and OVW Tv on 16th december are our favourites.

Who has been your biggest mentor inspiration?

We love learning from so many different people and love watching others to pick up and learn as much as we can. We have been very lucky to have been able to learn from guys like Rip Rogers, who is incredibly knowledgable and who is amazing to listen to and watch. We have enjoyed learning from the guys at OVW and have been inspired by guys like Sucio who is a great talent and has pushed us and made us challenge ourselves and who has really motivated us and taken time to help and support us.

Greatest accolades thus far?

Being OVW women's champion. We have been able to learn so much and have had lots of fun, facing new opponents and being given new challenges.

Is WWE/TNA an ambition for you?

Yes, of course! We would love the opportunity to work for those companies! WWE has always been a dream of ours since we were little and they have some girls who we would love to wrestle. TNA's women's division is also very cool so it would be great to experience that too, I'm sure we would learn so much.

Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

We would love to be under contract with a big wrestling company and fufilling that dream but also we would like to be having fun, travelling and continuing to learn as much as we can and get better.

Team Blossom versus who in a dream match?

There are so many people who we would love the opportunity to wrestle but as far as standing opposite them in a dream match, we would love to wrestle as a tag team against Beth Phoenix and Trish Stratus.

And finally what's next for Team Blossom?

At the moment we plan on returining to Ohio Valley Wrestling in the new year and want to continue training there. We loved our experience there and had an amazing time and can't wait to get back.

HOGAN'S FALSE HOPE

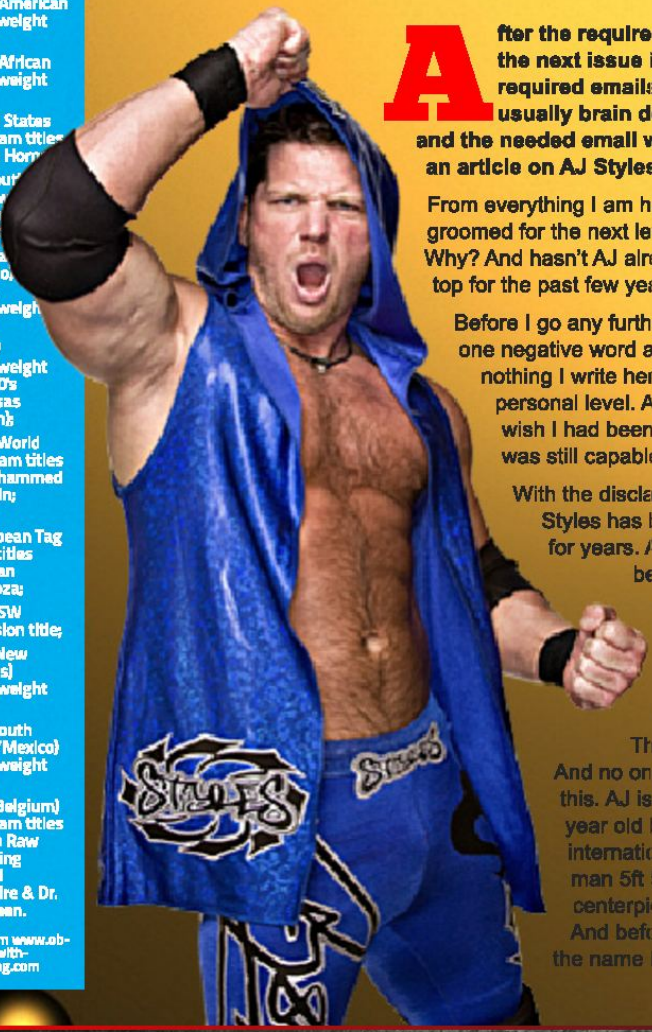
| By DUSTY WOLFE - dwolfe414@msn.com |

Dusty is a 20+ year veteran of the squared circle, six of those years being with the WWF and the remainder with promotions from all over the world!

Dusty's title history

- South American Heavyweight title;
- South African Heavyweight title;
- United States Tag Team titles w/Tim Horn
- Mid South Heavyw title (In versio
- PWI (Sa Antonio) States Heavyweigh title;
- WCCW Heavyweight title (90's Arkansas version);
- WWC World Tag Team titles w/Mohammed Hussein;
- WWC Carribbean Tag Team titles w/Galan Mendoza;
- NWA-SW Television title;
- CWF (New Orleans) Heavyweight title;
- IWF (South Texas/Mexico) Heavyweight title;
- FWF (Belgium) Tag Team titles w/Rob Raw defeating Gabriel Angelfire & Dr. Gangrean.

info from www.obsessedwith-wrestling.com



After the required emails reminding me the next issue is coming due, the required emails reminding Greg I am usually brain dead with original ideas, and the needed email with ideas, we agreed an article on AJ Styles might be in order.

From everything I am hearing AJ is going to be groomed for the next level. I have questions. Why? And hasn't AJ already been pushed to the top for the past few years?

Before I go any further. I have never heard one negative word about AJ Styles. So nothing I write here can be slanted on a personal level. AND, there are times I wish I had been that physical when I was still capable.

With the disclaimer out of the way... AJ Styles has been pushed to the top for years. And AJ has never become THE man. And AJ will never be THE man. And AJ will never get to that next level for two simple reasons.

The first reason is simple. And no one can do anything about this. AJ is smaller than most 14 year old boys. How does an international company make a man 5ft 5in tall, 170 pounds the centerpiece of their company? And before anyone throws out the name Misterio Jr., I know the

difference between a man pushed as the centerpiece of a company, and a man pushed to sell merchandise. And no, WWE has never tried to make Misterio Jr THE man.

Go through your wrestling history. The "small" world champs in the last 40 years were men like Verne Gagne and Pedro Morales that stood 5'11'' and weighed 220-240. The champs older fans remember fondly all stood 6'1" like Flair, to 6'4" like Dory Funk Jr.

PUTTING AJ STYLES IN THE POSITION THEY HAVE IS A GUARANTEED FAILURE

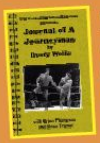
In the land of McMahon, so many talk how Vince went with "small" men after Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart proved a small man can get over. Both Bret and Shawn are 6'1'' and weighed 220-240 in their prime. I do not know about you, but a man 6'1" and 220 is not a small man in this part of the world. Wrestling has always been about "bigger than life". The reason smaller guys have taken over in wrestling is simple. Small guys are the ones going to the wrestling schools. Big men see that Vince McMahon has a stranglehold on the cash flow available, and they go other routes when it comes to making their income. Small guys are proving someone wrong while "living their dream". And the ticket buying public responds by staying away. Fans want to see that "bigger than life." And 5'5" is not bigger than life. No amount of rub from Hulk Hogan is changing that fact. If anything, a 6'7'' Hogan on the same show will only make matters worse. Compare and contrast?? I know I am not the only one that has heard that theory.

No amount of Eric Bischoff will change anything. I watched the TNA show with the debut of Hogan and Bischoff. And I saw that Bischoff has not learned one damn thing since he helped with the fall of WCW. Bischoff can still deliver the moments that catch your attention. While paying absolutely no attention to anything resembling details or continuity.

I know that little mini rant has nothing to do with AJ's size. BUT, that mini rant leads to my second reason AJ can never get over. AJ has no idea how to work. Remember I mentioned I wish I had some of his physical gifts? Those gifts do not translate in knowing what to do. The gifts do not translate into why I do these things. And so on, and so on. These gifts only mean AJ CAN do the moves. Think back. The men that actually survived Bischoff, Russo and the rest that had no idea about wrestling, running WCW, were the men that knew how to WORK. The rest... the performers that required a Bischoff..... exactly where are they now?

Hulk Hogan and the rest of his gang did exactly what they were hired to do. People watched, and people are talking about TNA. Putting AJ Styles in the position they have is a guaranteed failure. I am sure Bischoff has no idea about any of that. I am just as sure Hogan knows everything that will happen to AJ as it occurs. Besides the fact AJ is doomed to fail, I have to ask. Why would Hogan set the young man up like this..... ■

AGREE ? DISAGREE? LET US KNOW!



IN HIS BOOK, YOU WILL LEARN HOW DUSTY worked his way through the territories of wrestling during a time when Vince McMahon was taking his World Wrestling Federation to unforeseen heights. His years of working regularly for the WWF are covered and you'll learn how Dusty was given the task of helping Tiny Lister (Zeus) prepare for a main event run against Hulk Hogan in 1989.

Journal of a Journeyman - Available from www.rasslinriotonline.com - $19.99

UNDERTAKER MICHAELS II

| By JUSTIN LABAR - justin.labar@yahoo.com |

So often when a great movie comes out that captures everyones attention, the next thing that happens is the discussion of two questions.

The first is how much did it draw?

In the world of professional wrestling, perhaps one of the all time great stories we saw told in the ring was The Undertaker against Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania 25. The drawing power could hardly get any bigger. Two future hall of fame stars who have the longest tenure with the WWE and have done everything there is to do in a career. The Undertaker had the undefeated streak on the line and HBK was a believable and deserving candidate to finally beat him at the biggest show of the year.

The second is, will there be a sequel made? I respond to that question with a question of my own. Should we see it again?

Everyone wants to see another classic, but that is what constantly happens with sequels, they just doesn't live up to the original that came before them.

In September of 1997 at In Your House "Ground Zero" we saw the first meeting ever between the two. The match was good and ended in a no contest. The next month we saw HBK and Undertaker in the ring again, but it wasn't just another match, it was the first ever Hell In A Cell match. The match at WrestleMania 26 has not yet been made official but is probable to happen. I am not saying we should make this years match between HBK and Undertaker a HIAC match but the bar does have to be raised.

HIAC raised the stakes and there was an ending to their program by the debut of Kane, who would go on to start one of the most memorable feuds in wrestling history. So how do we raise the stakes? How do we find a way to have a match but have then not have both men disappear with no explanation until the summer?

It has been over 12 years since those first time meetings

between Michaels and Undertaker, and so much has changed. At the time they were involved in their '97 feud, they were both big names but had only been in the company for 7 years. I say "only" because that 7 years seems small compared to the nearly 20 years it has been now.

In the last 12 years they have held their status of being leaders of the WWE and there is no two competitors who command more respect from anyone due to their tenure and legacy. It's because of the long layoff and change in their career status of being the two veterans in the locker room that when they fought last year, it truly felt like another first time meeting.

This year's match between the two should be career versus career. I am not saying I want to say goodbye to either competitors in-ring career, but at some point we will have to. Both men are going to want to go out at a WrestleMania, as they rightfully should. Both men are going to want their final encounter to be a solid and memorable match, which history has shown they are more than capable of doing that with each other. The two should put their careers on the line, loser hang it up, than we will no doubt have the match again this year that will be able to top the previous year. We will have our sequel which will carry on the story proudly. It makes the match at 25 that much better to look at, seeing the two men put on a great match and have it set up the rematch where HBK comes back for round two, but at the cost of one of them having to retire.

Undertaker tells Shawn that they are going to fight one more time, but it will be the last. To ensure that it is the last, they put their storied careers up as the stipulation. The match at 25 between the two had everything a traditional one fall match could have. Great athletes, great build up, great stage, and tremendous in-ring action that told the story. One more traditional match at 26, I don't think would be good enough.

The only other way I could see it working is if everything is thought out from this point on about making a trilogy that is carefully executed. HBK wins this year at 26 and evens up the WrestleMania series 1 win a piece. Next year for 27, seeing as HBK took the streak away from Undertaker the deadman is now going to take HBK's career, and they make the 3rd match the final one by putting careers up on the line.

In my perspective, the bottom line is to preserve the relevance and legacy to one of best matches ever that took place at WrestleMania 25. If the feud is going to continue, the stakes must be raised!

Bogus Awards

Why the Year End Awards Are Less Than Accurate

As an industry, we all look forward to the annual year end awards. Whether it's through our favourite wrestling sites and forums, or mainstream magazines, debate rages heavily amongst fans as to who will win the best wrestler of the year, the best match, best promotion etc, etc.

| By PHIL AUSTIN - PhilUK1@aol.com |

The fact is, there are usually some clear favourites in the year end awards. For example, if Shawn Michaels v Undertaker doesn't win at least some of the best match awards then it will be a major surprise. But there remains a major problem with these awards.

To examine that problem, we need to look at awards in other industries. Wrestling after all is a predetermined entertainment industry, so its awards can be seen as akin to 'Best Movie' or 'Best Musical Act'. But herein lies the problem.

When judging 'best movie' for example, the chances are that all of the best movies made in 2009 have been seen by at least the majority of the voting public. Likewise, a 'best CD' will have been at least accessible to the large majority.

This is not the same in wrestling. Especially in mainstream wrestling

awards, the large majority of the voters only have regular access to two promotions...World Wrestling Entertainment and Total Nonstop Action. Therefore their scope of voting really just encompasses these two promotions (and occasionally one or two other promotion's shows they may have seen).

But wrestling, as we know, is far more than just a couple of promotions. Throughout the world, there are numerous other promotions running weekly shows that feature matches every bit as good, and in many cases better, than the matches featured on the 'big two' promotions.

Oh, and don't think you 'smart' fans can feel high and mighty about knowing these other promotions exist. You aren't exempt from these issues either. After all, how many of you can honestly say that, as well as having seen every Ring of Honor or Dragon Gate show in 2009, you've also seen all the shows that promotions such as Chikara, Jersey All Pro Wrestling, German Stampede Wrestling, IPW:UK, Triple X, DDT or Big Japan have put on. Until you have witnessed every good match that took place IN THE WORLD in 2009, then it's difficult to fully justify voting for a match or performer as the best in 2009.

So, maybe you've become an absolute anal-retentive devotee of the sport in 2009 and have gone out of your way to somehow watch every single match that took place everywhere. Even if this was possible, you still haven't seen every match. In fact, let me assure you, you still haven't seen every good WWE or TNA match.

ONE OF THE BEST MATCHES I SAW ALL YEAR....

You see, as well as matches that are taped for DVDs or TV, there are many others that are never recorded, including TNA house shows that often feature tremendous bouts amongst talented performers unrestrained by TNA Booking. I personally witnessed one of the best matches I saw all year, Sara Del Rey against Ayako Hamada at the November Shimmer tapings, that will not see the light of day until 2010.

It's a problem. How do you truly decide a 'best performer' or 'best match' of 2009 when many of those best matches won't have been seen? And that is a major flaw of year end awards in wrestling. Many of the best matches just aren't accessible to the mass voting audience.

But that doesn't make year end awards a bad thing. If you accept that there are these limitations to the awards, then you can also

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accept that the match voted 'the best of the year' or the wrestler voted 'the best of the year' is the best amongst the most known and recognised of the year.

It's a shame though that so many ply their trade worldwide without gaining these year end awards. I've been looking through a well-known torrent site's nominations for match of the year, and there are some amazing matches featuring the likes of Kota Ibushi and others that will never gain any attention outside of particularly niche wrestling sites. But these are every bit the matches that Shawn Michaels v Undertaker are.

I would highly recommend that, in 2010, we all expand our knowledge of wrestling. Go find promotions or performers you are unfamiliar with and you may just find some undiscovered gems that the year end awards never dig up. This won't affect the bias of the year end awards against these smaller promotions, but it will enrich your personal wrestling viewing. Until we get Kenny Omega v Kota Ibushi in a year end awards ceremony, it's the best we can do!

Footnote: Regardless of these flaws, there are some awards that cannot be disputed. The greatest loss to wrestling in 2009 has to be the deaths of Mitsuharu Misawa or Dr Death Steve Williams. Umaga and other deaths were sad, but Williams and Misawa's deaths were a tragic loss to wrestling worldwide. Some WWE or TNA fans may not know of these men, but the loss to the business is such that even the casual audience must know that these two men were incredibly important. Hopefully 2010 will not have many contenders for this award.

TNA is gonna party like it's 1989

| By THE CYNIC - hearditallbefore@hotmail.com |

I was dreaming when I wrote this...and it's still great. For those who know the Prince classic, your sides should be aching right about now. For those who don't, you disgust me. The head-to-head empty muscle flexing of those rival programmes has taken place now and the general feeling is that TNA took a bite out of WWE. Or that WWE marches on, unperturbed. Things should settle down in a few weeks.

Or maybe not. Because TNA have someone to shake the pieces up. An icon. A tarnished icon, to be sure, whose gilt is duller than a speech by Gary Lineker, but an icon. TNA have secured the not-that-difficult-to secure-at-all services of Hulk Hogan. This is a big signing. This is someone who is a big player. This is someone who made waves in wrestling

In the 1980's and some of the 1990's, yeah. Apart from bit parts, he's been famous for somewhat risible attempts to make himself a mainstream star since then - "Get out of my ring" anyone?

So TNA is putting its fate into the hands of a superstar well past his prime, who did his best work a decade or two ago. Sit down Sting. No, not you Steiner. Or you Nash. Back off, Booker...Getting crowded in here!

So "Impact" goes head-to-head with "Raw"; that's Hogan's MO all over, the big gesture. And of course, he's paired up with Bishoff, a man with an overdeveloped audacity gland and elephantiasis-like balls. He pitched "Nitro" against "Raw" and won, for about a year, then continued working his magic, leading to fabulous deficits and a defiant...purchase in a fire sale by WWE.

But forget about that, this is a new era, with a grizzled, wizened icon leading the charge. That it stinks of the past is no reason to gripe. In fact, TNA seems so happy to rely on icons from the past (here comes Scott Hall-quick, hide the Jamiesons!), here are some other people they could ask to help out:

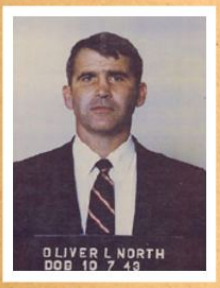
Ronald Reagan

He could then raise ticket prices by 100%, giving all the money to the top brass, whilst telling the fans that they would feel the effect of all the money they'd lost "trickling down" into their pockets as they open another can of beans for dinner.

Finally, he could take all the non-Caucasian wrestlers and put them in their own part of

the roster, in which they only wrestle each other and compete for, oooh, let's call it The Ghetto cup. They wouldn't be allowed to interact with Caucasians at all, unless they agreed to act more like the white wrestlers than the white wrestlers could.
Oh, but this is outrageous! No-one would agree to that, let alone endorse it for years! Erm..

General Oliver North



He'd be the manager of a tag team from Persia called the Iran Contricks. He could come down during their matches and, unseen by the ref, pass them all sorts of items - 2x4, road sign, chair - to help them win. Then, when the Contricks get more powerful, he can be amazed when they turn against him and beat him up with the very items he passed to them.

He could complain, leading to an investigation during which he raises his hand and swears that he never gave them any items at all, in fact he never met them. Even though we'd seem him do that week after week.

Look him up, lowbrow, he's important.

Leona Helmsley

Never mind the puffed-up pseudo progeny on the other side, let's have the real thing (although you'd have to ask Derek Acorah). For those too lazy to discover, Leona was the money-rich meanie that HHH was named after.

Of course, she would be a one-joke character, but that never hurt Ric Mayall and Ade Edmonson. She'd have to talk about her supposed family member in less than glowing terms, perhaps saying that he had his father's nose. And his aunt's. And his cousin's. All rolled into one. And she'd have to mention his time as the jodphured Hunter Hearst Helmsley, his failure to get over, his pigswill match with Henry O Godwinn, his bowing (and not just to the clique either). Yeah, it's personal, but that's the humour that Trip seems to glory in prog after prog. He calls himself the King of Kings - maybe it's time for an abdication. And it's just as funny as the time DX rolled a tank up to the WCW offices and pissed on the Alamo - oh no, that was Ozzy, wasn't it? Well, either way, extremely hilarious.

And if Leona imposed an entry fee/beauty tax on the roster, we'd lose ODB and Cody Deaner [too late! Ed]. NOW tell me it's not a fine idea!

New Romantics

You know, the powder-puffed, rouged-up 80's chart toppers. Why not? It's another group, and TNA loves groups. They'd be just as good as World Elite, and more stylish! Led by a manic Simon Le Bon, it would comprise the Kemp twins and heavyweight Tony Hadley from Spandau Ballet, Adam Ant, Pete Burns from Dead Or Alive and that black bloke from the Thompson Twins - Joe something. With their diverse talents, they couldn't help but secure the GOLD, asking their opponents to STAND & DELIVER their best shot, giving opponents a QUICK STEP & SIDE KICK as the TWO TRIBES go to war. They'd be NOTORIOUS. Yes, go ahead and check, they're all proper.

Alternatively, they could just resign Major Gunns, Hugh G Rection and that Van Hammer disappointment and live the delights of the late-90's Misfits In Action. Give Mike Sanders a job while you're at it, why don't you?

Yes, this has been a history lesson. Yes, it's all been about the 80's. Blame Ditzie Carter,

she's the one who brought 80's man Hogan back. Yes, I know he was around in the 90's too, but nothing great happened in that decade. In fact, quite a lot of you fools were born then. Je reste ma valise.

So get on the net, come off www.hunksintrunks.com (don't even bother to ransack your withered medulla oblongata for an excuse, just put your withered pastrycock away) and check out those 80's fan sites. You'll see that it's all there. See what I do for comedy? I don't even like the 80's.

And neither, I suspect, will TNA fans. This will end up with a load of elderly men in the ring throwing weak punches and raking each other's backs because to jump from the turnbuckle will bring on their glue ear. And anyway, their Doctor said no excitement.

What's that much-paraphrased (by me) truism? Those who don't learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them? We're set for no buys, dwindling numbers and overpaid egos on legs. Late '90's WCW, in other words.

As commentators brainlessly say, "it's like deja vu all over again".

The Cynic

Dave Mastiff

'The human hate machine' Dave Mastiff is one of the most well known wrestlers in the UK but after wrestling in the UK for many years he felt he needed a new challenge, Mastiff made the brave leap stateside to train at Ohio Valley Wrestling in Louisville, Kentucky.

For Mastiff the long road to becoming a wrestler started when he was 6 years old as a fan watching the WWF on TV and with that his mother took him to wrestling shows up and down the country.

When he was fifteen years old he decided he wanted to chase his dream of becoming a professional wrestler, luckily for Mastiff Future Championship Wrestling based out of the West Midlands opened up a training school.

He saw this as an opportunity. "I had been searching for somewhere to train and as I couldn't drive, they were perfect for me because they were only 10 minutes away from my house."

At FCW he learnt the basics. Bumping in the ring and running the ropes, but in 2004 Mastiff's wrestling career took an upturn. He met Charming Don Charles and soon joined SAS wrestling.

At SAS he really started perfecting his craft. The training was in much more detail than FCW and he started travelling up and down the country doing shows in London and the West Midlands. His trainers would review his previous matches and it was at SAS where improvement in certain areas became clear to see.

Mastiff made a name for himself in SAS and was soon being booked by different companies all over the UK. He started teaming with Jack Storm in tag team matches all over the country, and the two went on to hold the Tag Team Championships in many different promotions.

Being on the road gave Mastiff an opportunity to meet new people and visiting different places he may never have seen before without being a wrestler.

"I wanted a new challenge." States Mastiff, "I had worked a couple of shows with Nick and Doug and got speaking to them about going somewhere new. I managed to learn a ton off those guys so where better to go than to the place that taught them? OVW sounded right for me."

OVW has a rich history, going back many years, of producing some of the biggest names who have gone on to be major stars in WWE. John Cena, Randy Orton and Shelton Benjamin are just a few who attended.

Leaving family and friends behind to go to the USA would faze some people but for the 25 year old this was just another step in a long line of constant sacrifices. He showed his dedication by no longer going out to bars and clubs at the weekend. He struggled to be in relationships because of the travel schedule and lost some friends.

But Mastiff feels it is all worth it to succeed in his chosen profession, he realises that it is the nature of what he does and that going to OVW was something he had to do. His family and friends support him all the way.

"The facilities here at OVW are tremendous; people don't appreciate facilities like this often. I certainly never had anything remotely similar when I started back in the UK."

OVW currently has a one hour TV show in the Kentucky area, which is a massive difference to what he experienced in the UK. "When we have TV tapings it's very different to what I used to do in Britain. Every little thing is geared for the camera, whereas non televised events are strictly for the audience in attendance."

Leaving family and friends behind to go to the USA would faze some people but for the 25 year old this was just another step in a long line of constant sacrifices. He showed his dedication by no longer going out to bars and clubs at the weekend. He struggled to be in relationships because of the travel schedule and lost some friends.

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Photos: TONY KNOX
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Certainly the biggest challenge Mastiff faces is trying to make it in the WWE, but the 25 year old is optimistic: "Definitely would love to go to WWE, everyone has that ambition and I am no different.

"I have had the intention to succeed since day 1 and that shall stay with me regardless, but firstly I would like to find myself in a strong position of employment whether that is in America, Japan or Europe."

Looking back on his previous matches, Mastiff recalls with enthusiasm that he enjoyed his matches against Eugene, the TLC with Jack Storm vs The DragonHearts and various others against Zack Sabre Jr and Johnny Moss.

'The Human Hate Machine' would love to be in the ring with his boyhood hero Shawn Michaels but he also cites there are so many great wrestlers in the world that he would love to have the chance to step in the ring with.

When asked who his inspirations are Mastiff mentioned names such as Shawn Michaels, Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Dynamite Kid, Arn Anderson and Chris Benoit. "I grew up watching those guys and I take so much from them to better myself."

"People who have inspired me personally are Charming Don. He was a massive help to me. Rip Rogers who trains me at OVW is a massive inspiration; he has so much knowledge and is 100% honest with you. He doesn't do bullshit that's for sure."

Looking to the future Mastiff believes he can be a huge success; he has great belief in himself and his ability but realises there is a need to stay grounded and to take nothing for granted.

He will soon be arriving back in the UK and seems excited. One thing is for sure, this man is going to have a huge impact on British wrestling when he returns.

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Quit Complaining!

Why Sheamus's Championship Reign is Good for Wrestling

By JOHN M. MILNER - docmilner42@hotmail.com

By the time you read this, Sheamus may well be referred to as "the former WWE Champion". And there may be a rather large number of you reading this who will be applauding that fact.

Certainly, the unlikely rise of Sheamus from mid-card newcomer to WWE Champion has been met with a reaction more akin of the Brooklyn Brawler doing the same. And certainly there is reason to believe Sheamus may be less the next Ric Flair than the next Ronnie Garvin, just a lame-duck champion, inserted into the title's lineage as a way to create interest in how Cena/Orton/Triple H will come back to claim another title reign.

However, before we write off Sheamus and his time with the title completely, perhaps there is cause to look upon his reign as a positive step forward for the WWE.

Vince McMahon used to say, back in his days behind the mic, "Anything can happen in the WWE!" (Well, he didn't exactly say that word for word, but with the court-ordered altered history of the organisation, that's what we'll have to go with.)

"Anything can happen in the WWE!"

How long has it been since anyone, even the biggest WWE mark, really believed that? For far too long, the title scene in the WWE has been stale and stagnant. Read any wrestling-related message board or website, and the fans, be they marks, smarts or anywhere in between, will tell you they are bored with the modern wrestling product.

In fact, the most excited the IWC has been lately is over ratings stunts pulled by both WWE (Bret Hart's return) and TNA (the first appearance by Hulk Hogan) in early January. Perhaps that proves that fans still care about the sport, but only when they're unable to predict what they're going to see.

And so, perhaps wrestling fans should be getting excited about the idea of Sheamus rather than Sheamus himself.

What I mean by that is that, heading into the Jesse Ventura-hosted edition of Raw, no one expected Sheamus to be elevated to main event status, much less face John Cena for the title at Tables, Ladders and Chairs.

In fact, I'm sure I'm not alone in saying that, as the November 23rd edition of Raw rolled on, I was expecting Ventura's "Breakthrough" tournament to be nothing more than one long segue to Orton winning, and going on to face John Cena...again.

Even when Orton was eliminated by Kofi Kingston, I expected Kingston, he of the larger push at the time, rather than Sheamus to win. Kingston vs. Cena, a rare face-vs.-face match for the title at TLC, would have been enough of a shake-up in the usual tedium that is WWE booking strategies to be appreciated. Certainly, Kingston probably has enough popularity to make

A Journeyman's Blog

- Real thoughts about the real world of pro wrestling -

www.dustywolfe.com

even the most discouraged WWE fan raise an eyebrow and take some added interest.

But instead it was Sheamus who eliminated Kingston and, with a bit of rub from Guest Host Ventura, was declared the Number #1 contender.

But even then, who expected Sheamus to actually win? Instead of being seen as a legitimate threat to Cena's title, Sheamus seemed to be more of a throwback to the contenders of the mid-80s, when Bobby Heenan would lead some behemoth into battle against Hulk Hogan on Saturday Night's Main Event. We no more expected Sheamus to capture the WWE Championship than we did Hercules Hernandez back in the day (with all due respect to the late Ray Fernandez).

And yet, when TLC was over, Sheamus was your new WWE Champion...and the wrestling world was left to shake its head.

But far from being a negative development, Sheamus's victory should be seen as something that could pay dividends in the WWE. The installation of this new champion means that, for the first time in years, McMahon's adage of "Anything can happen in the WWE" might have a bit more ring of truthfulness to it.

Sheamus wasn't supposed to be WWE Champion. He wasn't even supposed to be in the title match at TLC. That match was supposed to be another in the lengthy (read: too long) series between Orton and Cena. At the very most, Sheamus might have made it on to the undercard, with him battling Kofi Kingston instead of Orton. This change in the expected booking style can only be seen as a good sign, an indication the WWE booking staff might, at last, be realising that they need to change it up a bit.

I won't try and argue that Sheamus's reign as champion will be remembered as a key moment in the industry's history, nor even in the history of the WWE. However, on a short-term basis at least, it might just be that event which sticks in people's mind. The next time there's a tournament, a battle royal, or even a major match in which a dark horse is entered, fans might not be so quick to rule out that long shot.

Anything the WWE can do to keep fans on their toes and keep them guessing is going to keep them tuned in. Because if, going into next week's Raw, the main event is predictable, why watch? Why not just toss a movie in the DVD player and then read the recaps? The WWE has to give fans reason to expect the unexpected, to want to tune in. If they don't expect any major surprises, they're not going to bother.

If the WWE wants to return to the heights of popularity it saw in the mid-80s and again in the late-90s, it should forget the advent of Guest Hosts and give the fans a reason to tune in that's based on the unpredictability of their product.

Having Sheamus as WWE Champion may not have been the perfect move, but it proves that somewhere, someone isn't afraid to throw out the usual playbook and improvise.

DESMOND WOLFE

When TNA announced they'd be touring the UK in January none of us could quite have imagined what would happen in the ensuing months. The arrival of Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff definitely wasn't anticipated and neither was the rise of Desmond Wolfe to the upper levels of the TNA roster. In fact we'd have been asking "Desmond who?"

Last summer saw Nigel McGuinness with a big decision to make. After leaving ROH where he'd been World Champion, most of us expected him to make the jump to WWE where an instant push probably means being thrown off the top of a cage. Even Sheamus had to languish for years in developmental before reaching the main roster.

However fans were shocked when McGuinness didn't just turn up in TNA but with a new name and plunged right in at the deep end as he feuded with Kurt Angle and had the upper hand until their scorching PPV matches.

Fast forward to January and Wolfe finds himself back in England for a TNA tour that will see him receive two shots at the TNA World Heavyweight title held by AJ Styles. He's got a few problems though has Mr, Wolfe. "It's miserable. Grey skies, rain and no offers of sex so far" he told me. Not quite the answer I was expecting I can tell you.

The Londoner is no stranger to the UK of course but his time here has been spent wrestling for companies up and down the country, mainly in small halls, so it's a big deal for him to now be taking on the best of TNA in venues such as Wembley Arena, the Manchester MEN Arena and The Bournemouth International Centre. So weather and lack of sex aside, how's he looking forward to the UK tour? "It's going to be fantastic, I can't wait. It's good to be back in England, there's always a great crowd."

YOU CAN'T HELP BUT TO GET BETTER WHEN YOU TAKE ON A GUY AS GOOD AS KURT

As well as facing AJ Styles, the rest of the tour is hardly going to be plain sailing with opponents such as Samoa Joe, The Pope and Kurt Angle likely to be taking him on but Wolfe is just glad to be here and facing such challenges. "Well I didn't know what they had planned for me, I didn't even know I was even going to be on the tour so that's how stoked I am. As they say in the States they've given me the ball now I have to run with it."

So let's go back a few months and that decision about his future that saw him end up in TNA, just what was going on and why did he choose his new home? "To cut a long story short, TNA made me the best offer at the end of the day, WWE had a few issues but TNA had the best ideas."

To be given that feud with Kurt Angle though was an absolute god send. Wolfe was no stranger to wrestling great ring technicians after his many battles with Bryan Danielson in ROH but to be so prominent in TNA from day one must have surpassed his own dreams. "Absolutely. I couldn't have wished for a better start, a programme with a top guy like Kurt. He's a guy who really knows the business and he knows what's big for business. It was a lot of fun and a good learning experience. You can't help but to get better when you take on a guy as good as Kurt."

That week when Desmond Wolfe attacked Kurt Angle so severely that his opponent had to be taken away on a stretcher will go down as one of the most memorable episodes of Impact in TNA history. It's not that vicious lariat that people will talk about though, something that doesn't really disappoint Wolfe too much, but the announcement that Hulk Hogan was joining TNA. So how did Wolfe react when he heard the news? "It caught me off guard. A friend texted me and I couldn't believe my ears."

Photos © TNA Wrestling

| By STEVE ASHFIELD - mageditoruk@googlemail.com |

Since the announcement of the arrival of Hogan in TNA we've been bombarded with claims that TNA can become the number one company in the world, but then again what else would they say? So what does Wolfe think Hogan can bring to TNA (apart from his best friends)? "I hope he can get us the kind of notoriety, exposure that we need. The company has always had a great look. "I hope we take the show to Monday night but we can't do it right away. You can't just sail into the ocean if it's not good enough for swimming in."

So far though all that seems to have happened is the signing of several ex-WWE/WCW wrestlers and the arrival of a shock jock who wouldn't be within a million miles of TNA if he didn't know Hulk Hogan. Are wrestlers like Hall, Waltman, Flair and The Nasty Boys really going to send the ratings through the roof or are fans right to be worried about the changes being made? "It's difficult for me to say because I'm not a wrestling fan. It needs to have recognisable faces and for the younger guys to get over" says Wolfe.

Another change that has ruffled the feathers of TNA fans is the prompt removal of the six-sided ring but Wolfe doesn't think that's a bad move and won't affect the wrestlers who have been using it for several years. "It's not that difficult, the guys have wrestled in four sided rings before. The ropes are slightly looser than on a four-sider, but it's easier for me to do some of the moves because it's 90 degrees in the corner not 60."

Being a pro wrestler is sometimes like being a comedian when it comes to catchphrases. If you can get fans to instantly react by simply uttering a word or a phrase then that certainly helps get you over with the fans. So just who came up with the idea for Desmond Wolfe to start using the word 'wanker'? "I did. They seem entertained by it and nobody has been offended so I can use it with aplomb." But do the Americans really know what the word means? "No, a lot of them think wanker is a word for our penis. Show me your wanker?"

It might not be over yet though, Wolfe teased about adding a few more words to his range, though I think using the word 'bollocks' might add further to the confusion and wouldn't quite make it onto the next Desmond Wolfe T-shirt.

Years ago the audience at the Oscars were told that the Brits were coming and in terms of pro wrestling that definitely seems to be the case in 2010 with not just Wolfe but stars such as Doug Williams, Brutus Magnus, Rob Terry. Drew McIntyre, Paul Burchill, Katie Lea and of course William Regal all doing well in WWE and TNA. So is this a golden age for British wrestlers in the States? "Certainly hope so," Wolfe told me. "it's been a long time coming and we've certainly had to pay our dues."

Lack of Diversity IN THE WWE

| By MARTYN JOHN - martstakally@live.co.uk |

It hasn't exactly been a closely guarded secret that in recent times, the WWE have been struggling to push new and young stars through the 'glass ceiling'. As a result, despite their best efforts, the WWE are increasingly finding themselves with a talented undercard and a stagnant main event. Understandably this is concerning for the company as a stagnant main event means a repetitive product and fewer viewers and PPV sales. But, if the undercard is unable to push through that ceiling into the main event then what other alternative does WWE have?

Well realistically, none. Despite the internet wrestling community's hopes and dreams of a John Morrison WWE Title reign (let's face it; we don't count), the truth is that there isn't a wrestler outside of the current main event scene that is capable of carrying the company. Paul 'Big Show' Wight recently said, "flat out there's not anybody good enough to take my position,", and unfortunately he's right....just as soon as I figure out what he actually does....(answers on a postcard readers).

IN THE SEEMINGLY NEVER ENDING FEUD, KINGSTON'S STATUS HAS HARDLY CHANGED

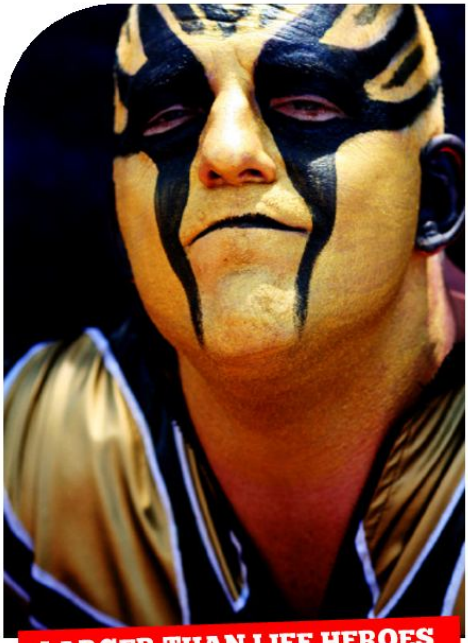
Before my email inbox gets pelted with angry emails and homoerotic 'tribute' videos from YouTube of everyone's favourite underused wrestler, please just read on. I'm not saying that these guys don't possess the skill or charisma (yes I've seen all those independent promos and the stuff they all did before they had to 'tone it down, thank you very much), they are just not able to push through solidly into the main event.

This isn't about to turn into an angry rant on how WWE aren't giving these people opportunities – because they are. Kofi Kingston is a perfect example of this, The Jamaican... no wait Ghanan...but ultimately American Superstar has recently feuded with The Viper, Vintage Randy "The Ram" Orton (ok I'll stop with the nicknames) and in the seemingly never ending feud, Kingston's status has hardly changed . Here is a case where the WWE has pushed Kofi and made him come off strong against Orton and where Kofi has used the opportunity given as well as he could have, yet when all was said and done; not much happened as a result.

So if it's not the company's fault in handling the push and not that of the wrestler, then where does the problem lie? Well, ultimately still with the company, but not because of their treatment of individual Superstars but of the entire current generation of the undercard.

Part of this comes from the way the business has changed in general. The WWE has moved

towards being more respectable and less of a joke to advertisers and other industries such as Hollywood. As a result, we've seen a shift away from 'wrestling' and a new focus on variety 'entertainment', with WWE Superstars being billed as entertainers over wrestlers. This shift, has resulted in a less gimmick orientated product with new 'entertainers' being pushed as credible professionals as opposed to the characters given during the Attitude and 'Golden' eras of wrestling.



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LARGER THAN LIFE HEROES AND VILLAINS THAT CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION

Do you remember when everyone had a backstory? When wrestlers were larger than life, characters that performed superhuman and incredible feats? Do you remember when rivalries would be soap operatic and everyone was debuted for a reason? As corny and cheesy as it was, it made the WWF the global entity it now is.

In times past, every wrestler had a reason to be where they were or to do what they did. Kane was The Undertaker's vengeful brother and Mankind was the boiler room dwelling psychopath. The characters that these wrestlers became were larger than life heroes and villains that captured the imagination of wrestling fans worldwide, catapulting them to stardom in the WWF.

In these times, everyone had a gimmick, a character with their own motives and personality. These gimmicks and characters allowed even the less talented workers such as Val Venis, Goldust and The Big Boss Man to get hugely over and maintain their popularity for years despite never being 'top tier' figures in the company.

The irony of this situation is that today the in-ring work of the younger talent is arguably better than it has ever been. Due to the increase of variety in the wrestling industry, the bar has been raised and we are able to see far more innovative matches on the undercard from workers who are in far better physical shape than those of the 80's and 90's. That is why it is so ironic that even though we have a new generation of highly athletic wrestlers, they still cannot get over as much as the 'old school', less athletic, gimmicky workers.

This is the WWE's main problem and reason for current dependence on the limited main event scene and older wrestlers. Without a character, strong personality or any background, why are we meant to care what a particular Superstar does?

Presently, the WWE undercard can fall into three main categories:

Angry Young Man: e.g. Drew McIntyre, Dolph Ziggler, Paul Burchill, Jack Swagger, Carlito.etc

Nice Young Man: e.g. John Morrison, Evan Bourne, Kofi Kingston, Chris Masters.etc

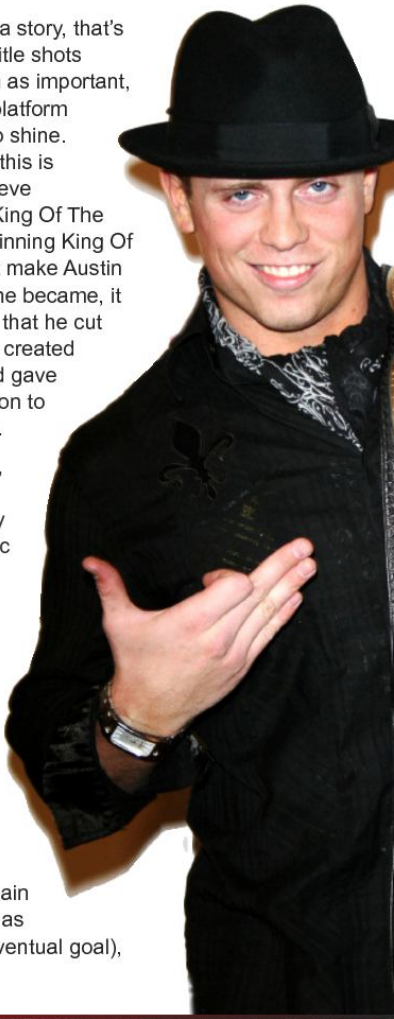
Monster: e.g. Mike Knox, Sheamus, Vance Archer, Ezekial Jackson, Vladimir Koslov.etc

Not only do the Superstars all share the same basic template as the others in their group, but they can all switch between babyface and heel with no explanation and suffer little consequence. It's commonplace to suddenly see a Superstar just come out as a heel or babyface with no reason for the change. How can fans rally around a Superstar that has no outstanding characteristics, have no backstory and can suddenly flip between heel and babyface with little effect as to what they are like?

Quite frankly, they can't and have no reason to. It's unfair to expect people to suddenly start supporting someone just because they came out of the 'good guy' ramp (yeah, real great idea TNA). Despite their best efforts to make wrestling look like a more professional, legitimate environment, the WWE need to realise that it is not and nor will it ever be taken 'seriously'.

Wrestling isn't MMA or Boxing where a person can become popular due to winning matches, we need to be given a reason to care about a wrestler, to want them to succeed or fail. I'm not downplaying the importance of winning matches, but that should serve to add credibililty to a Superstar not be their main source of development.

Fact is people know that wrestling is a 'work' and just because a wrestler wins a title or earns a title shot, it does not make them popular or give the fans a reason to care about them. Wrestling is about telling a story, that's why titles and title shots should be seen as important, but used as a platform for a wrestler to shine. An example of this is 'Stone Cold' Steve Austin's 1996 King Of The Ring victory. Winning King Of The Ring didn't make Austin the mega star he became, it was the promo that he cut afterwards that created Austin 3:16 and gave the fans a reason to care about him.



By comparison, John Morrison who is arguably far more athletic than Austin, turned from Angry Young Man to Nice Young Man with no explanation, then went on to wrestle matches against Angry Young Men (again with no reason as to why or his eventual goal),

before winning the Intercontinental Championship. There hasn't been a point in his babyface run that we have been given a reason to like him, or support him as a good guy. Therefore, giving him a title belt doesn't give any reason for the fans to clamour over him. Since his win he has been involved in a rivalry with Angry Young Man Dolph Ziggler, who was then replaced by equally generic Angry Young Man Drew McIntyre (who incidentally first debuted as a Nice Young Man) and as of yet, we have not been given a reason as to why they are fighting other than one is Angry and one is Nice.

Superstars like Austin and The Rock didn't make themselves household names by being generic and facing generic opponents. Neither did they make themselves household names by being outstanding in the ring. They made them by creating a character and catchphrases and being involved in rivalries and bitter feuds that were over the top and personal. So if people like Hogan, The Rock and Austin never had to try and squeeze fans like blood from a stone by being generic (let's not forget "Die Rocky die"), how can the WWE expect people like Morrison and Evan Bourne to?

I know condemning an entire generation is pretty pessimistic, but it's not too late to turn things around.

Over in the land of RAW there is a young Superstar who has been gaining a lot of attention recently as a rising star and strong mid card worker. He has built up an interesting character and has strong mic skills to carry it off and to draw the fans into every angle he is involved in. This Superstar could well be the future of the main event if his character is allowed to develop and gain more depth; he is The Miz.

Now don't get me wrong, if somebody had told me a few years ago that The Miz was going to be hailed as a future main event Superstar, I probably would have either had them sectioned or got them a job as a writer in TNA. However, even though The Miz being the saviour of the current generation is one of the signs of the apocalypse (after famine, but before Vince McMahon's retirement), stranger things have happened...though none come to mind.

Joking aside, The Miz has done something that most of his peers are struggling with. He has broken out of the character types and created a unique persona. As a result, The Miz has captured the fan's attention and is a few victories and feuds away from being a solid main event player. He's used his United States Championship run as a platform to shine and has developed tremendously both in the ring and on the microphone in an incredibly short period of time.

The Miz's mic work on the January 11th edition RAW stands as a testament to this development and puts him head and shoulders above most of his peers, not only making The Miz a star for the future, but one that the WWE should take note and use as the standard for all undercard workers.

Chances are we will never see the larger than life gimmicks of the Attitude and Golden era. However, it doesn't mean we are doomed to forever face a stagnant main event and a bland, generic undercard. It's not too late for the WWE to inject life into the undercard (insert steroid joke here); the WWE just needs to look back at how the mega stars of the past we made and remember what wrestling is all about.

Dark Kitty

Nov 28 Professional Debut 2009

TWP has been chronicling the trials and tribulations of 15 year old Daniella Kaylin and her attempts to become a professional wrestler,

and we are pleased to report that her hard work and determination has finally paid off. With the help of four superstars of the Triple A in Zamora Michoacan, Mexico, November 28th, 2009, saw the professional debut of Daniella's alter-ego 'Dark Kitty'. The match, originally scheduled as a two out of three fall match between La Parka and Rocky Romero Vs The Russian Alex Koslov and Japan's Kenzo Zusuki, took on an added twist as Dark Kitty entered the ring on the side of Koslov and Zusuki.

The Referee for that match was El Hijo de Tirantes, who awarded the first fall to Dark Kitty, Koslov and Suzuki. During the second match La Parka got a hold of Dark Kitty by the throat and backed her into a corner, and as he

went back to launch a powerful attack he changed his mind and decided to plant a kiss on Dark Kitty instead, sending her across the ring gagging and choking, to the satisfaction of the audience who seemed to take to Dark Kitty right from the get go. Little known to La Parka that happened to be the first kiss in Dark Kitty's young life!

Round two ended as Rocky Romero pinned Alex Koslov. Round three ended as La Parka pinned Kenzo Zusuki. Although suffering a defeat in the match, Dark Kitty could not have been more proud then to have her first official wrestling match with these four wonderful superstars.

As the night came to an end a conversation occurred between Dark Kitty and La Parka with these words sticking in her head, "Antonio Peña made the Triple A to make dreams come true and Dark Kitty, with continued love for wrestling, here your dreams will become reality".

Congratulations Daniella, you deserve it!

WWE decade in review (Part 1)

By MARK ALLEN - markallen@insidepulse.com

Greetings one and all, this is Mark Allen Satrang, long-time pro wrestling fan for over twenty-years, dating back to my earliest memories in 1988. I went on to earn a Masters degree from the University of South Dakota, and wrote my graduate thesis on the subject of pro wrestling. Among other places I have written (and continue to write) for both Examiner.com as the National Pro Wrestling Examiner and for Pulse Wrestling as one of their premiere WWE scribes.

I was graciously invited to be a part of The Wrestling Press to add some more WWE flavour to this already great magazine. For my first outing here is a look back at the decade that was for the premiere wrestling organisation in the world.

In 2000 the World Wrestling Federation arguably reached some of their highest peaks creatively and in regards to depth of their talent roster.

They started the year with a bang with the Royal Rumble from their home base in Madison Square Garden. But the week after Royal

Rumble the company really put things into overdrive when the foursome of Chris Benoit, Eddie Guerrero, Perry Saturn and Dean Malenko all jumped from World Championship Wrestling to the WWF. The foursome, in addition to the The Dudleyz, The Hardyz, Edge and Christian, Tazz, Angle and Chris Jericho, gave the company their deepest mid-card roster in years while men like Triple H, The Rock, The Big Show, Kane and Undertaker carried the top end of the cards. This

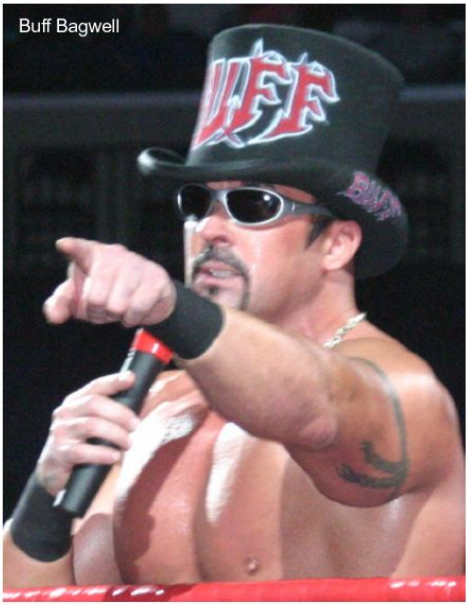
allowed the company to put on fantastic top-to-bottom pay per views throughout the year, with Backlash in April and SummerSlam in August being especially noteworthy.

In the absence of Stone Cold Steve Austin (who was out with a neck injury), Triple H became the focal point of the company. Thanks to an on-air (and subsequent backstage) relationship with Stephanie McMahon, he was the top antagonist. After career making victories over Mick Foley and an even rivalry with The Rock, Triple H looked like a threat. In addition to his battles with Foley and Rock and young stars like Jericho and Angle, he defeated Chris Benoit in his first match in the company. Benoit, who was WCW World Champion up until he joined the WWF, was used to emphatically show that the WWF is the big game in town.

The WWF also took a big step business-wise as well, when they moved from their long-standing home on the USA Network and took their show to The National Network (TNN.) TNN was in the process of re-branding itself from The Nashville Network into something broader, which would in turn lead to the network that is now known as Spike TV.

When 2000 ended the World Wrestling Federation was riding high as the premier pro wrestling league in the United States (and North America) while both World Championship Wrestling and Extreme Championship Wrestling were on their deathbeds.

WCW was hemorrhaging money left and right and it was clear they would not survive in their



current state. Eric Bischoff and a group of investors had put together a package to buy WCW and all of its trademarks and talent from AOL Time Warner in order to restart the company.

Meanwhile ECW had lost their TNN television deal in September 2000 but was surviving like they had in the past thanks to their website, local programming, word-of-mouth and a ridiculously loyal fanbase. Unfortunately they put on what was their last pay per view, “Guilty As Charged,” on January 6, and then the company faded into obscurity. The writing was on the wall at the time of the show, but the majority of the fans and remaining talent stayed positive as future house shows and pay per views were booked for the future. But the final nail in the coffin became official when on March 3 Paul Heyman debuted on Monday Night RAW as the colour commentator, while still wearing an ECW ball cap. It was right then and

there that everyone who was a fan or associated with the company knew that the "little promotion that could" was officially gone.

Over in WCW, the Bischoff-Fusient Media Ventures deal (which had all been but announced in WCW storylines) fell through when AOL Time Warner would not sell the promotion's television time slots on TNT and TBS to go along with all of the WCW trademarks, copyrights and physical property. Vince and the WWF swooped and bought their competition for a song and just like that, the fabled Monday Night War was over.

The news became official in March and "Greed" would be WCW's final pay per view on March 18, with the "series finale" shown live on TNT on March 26, which was WCW's traditional spring break episode. Word spread fast on the Internet and it was announced that 24 talents from WCW would be absorbed by the WWF as part of the new deal. But thanks to the iron clad contracts that many of WCW's top stars (including Goldberg, Ric Flair, Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, Scott Steiner, Sting, Bret Hart and Hulk Hogan) had signed with AOL Time Warner they did not come along for the initial ride. The top guys actually earned more by sitting at home and getting paid than taking the buyout to move to the WWF. Thus WWF acquired the company's mid-card and many of their young inexperienced stars instead. Only Booker T (WCW's World and United States Champion) and Diamond Dallas Page took the buyouts to join the WWF.

In addition to all the furore going on with WCW, the World Wrestling Federation was preparing for arguably their greatest pay per view of all time, WrestleMania X-Seven, live from Houston, Texas. The card was stacked with eleven PPV matches, six Title bouts, four personal feuds and a fun gimmick battle royal to break up the momentum. The show is widely heralded as one of the top five wrestling cards in history, with TLC 2 and Rock-Austin considered two of the best matches of the decade, let alone the year.

With WCW officially WWF property, analysts and fans ran wild with speculation on what would become of the WCW franchise. The original plan was to have the two companies run as separate franchises under the WWF umbrella, with Vince McMahon running the WWF and Shane McMahon running WCW. Unfortunately TNN (WWF's home at the time) didn't want another ailing brand like WCW on their network.

Thus an inter-promotional invasion began, with former WCW talents invading the WWF at random intervals. Initially the excitement was high, but WCW mid-card wrestlers attacking WWF mid-card wrestlers didn't set the world on fire. Plus the first ever WCW match on Monday Night RAW, a World Title match between Booker T and Buff Bagwell, bombed horribly and cost Bagwell his job. It was apparent to those in charge the sides wouldn't work, so WWF wrestlers began "defecting" to

Stephanie McMahon

WCW and on the July 9 RAW, the ECW brand was resurrected thanks to the arrivals of Rob Van Dam and Tommy Dreamer and the defection of eight former ECW talents. With Shane McMahon leading WCW and Stephanie McMahon & Paul Heyman leading ECW, "The Alliance" was formed.

At the InVasion pay per view in July, Stone Cold Steve Austin turned on the WWF and joined The Alliance. This completely changing the scope of the storyline from a groundbreaking WWF versus WCW inter-promotional invasion money making rivalry into another tired McMahon versus McMahon story of good versus evil. Every Alliance member was made a villain and every WWF guy was a hero, even if it did not fit his or her natural character.

What transpired was six months of disappointing television and pay per views that saw the rapid swapping of fourteen different championships floating through the company and nonsensical character changes. Mercifully the story ended at Survivor Series in November when the WWF team captained by The Rock outlasted The Alliance team, captained by Austin, thus ending the storyline.

The next night on RAW things reset nicely with Shane and Stephanie leaving TV, Mr. McMahon returning as a villain, Austin returning as a hero, and the arrival of Ric Flair as the company's new storyline owner, having bought Shane and Stephanie's half of the WWF just days earlier. The storyline of Flair and McMahon as competing owners would lead company storylines into 2002. In addition, in order to clean up the plethora of championships floating around the company, many Championships were unified together, most notably the WCW World Championship (which was simply renamed the World Heavyweight Championship) and the WWF World Championship. In the main event of Vengeance in December, after Austin beat Kurt

Brock Lesnar

Angle in a WWF Championship match and Chris Jericho beat The Rock in a WCW Championship match, Jericho pinned Austin to become the company's first ever Undisputed WWF World Heavyweight Champion.

With WWF the only game in town in the early part of the year they looked to create competition for themselves internally by instituting a company wide brand expansion.

Storyline company owners Ric Flair and Vince McMahon divvied up the roster with Flair controlling the RAW show and its subsidiaries and McMahon controlling SmackDown and its crew. It provided a sense of inter-league play

and a chance to get more talent on TV over the course of the week, as well as introduce new stars from their developmental leagues.

The experiment really got rolling though in June when McMahon took control of the entire company again, but rather than do away with the expansion, he instituted Eric Bischoff as General Manager for RAW and Stephanie McMahon SmackDown GM. It created a summertime bidding war for talent and help set the rosters. Plus the shock of Eric Bischoff appearing on WWE programming and embracing Vince McMahon was a sight that most wrestling fans thought they would never see.

The brand expansion got an immediate shot in the arm when Brock Lesnar arrived on the scene the night after WrestleMania X8 and made an immediate impact. He was instantly dubbed "The Next Big Thing" and went on a warpath en route to capturing the Undisputed WWE Championship from The Rock at SummerSlam. His quick rise to stardom was something not seen often in WWE. It was a testament to Lesnar's talent, ability, charisma and intangible "it" factor that allowed him to become WWE Champion only five months after his national television debut. En route to his defeat of The Rock he went through certifiable legends like Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair to cement himself as the star of the day.

In addition to Lesnar's debut, the brand expansion allowed many new stars to get their day in the sun. Most notably Batista, Randy Orton and John Cena all made their WWE television debuts during the summer of 2002 as well. While the three men all had inauspicious debuts at the time, they have formed the nucleus of today's World Wrestling Entertainment and are bona fide main event level superstars and multiple time World Champions.

While many new stars made their first mark in WWE in 2002, it was an old favourite who also made a surprising return to action. After the WWE's version of the new World order (featuring original members Hulk Hogan, Scott Hall and Kevin Nash) failed for a variety of reasons, Shawn Michaels was brought back to television to help out the failing group. The new experiment failed quickly and attention turned to Michaels reuniting with his old DeGeneration X running buddy Triple H. This led to Michaels coming out of his four-year retirement to battle Triple H in a Street Fight at SummerSlam. The match was phenomenal and Michaels looked great coming off his supposedly career ending back injury. It seemed as if the Street Fight would be Michaels' last match, a farewell of sorts, however his back began feeling much better and he tiptoed into a part-time return to the ring, which culminated in winning the World Heavyweight Championship in the inaugural Elimination Chamber at Survivor Series.

On the business front, the WWF also took a massive blow. For years the World Wrestling Federation co-existed with the World Wildlife Fund using the WWF moniker. However their co-existence came to screeching halt in the spring of 2002 when a court in England ruled that the World Wrestling Federation had violated terms of a previous agreement between the two companies and would be forced to change their company name.

Thus the iconic WWF, a name synonymous with professional wrestling for over 20 years, became known as World Wrestling Entertainment. Judgment Day in May became the first pay per view event in company history promoted under the WWE banner. The change caused WWE to no longer use the trademark scratch-style logo that became iconic during the Attitude era, or utter the letters "WWF" together. History and tape was forced to be re-written, blurred and edited to remove any footage of the old scratch logo and the WWF name. To their credit, the company embraced the new WWE name

immediately and even created merchandise and commercials hyping the change with a sense of humour.

In addition the company endured a wild flight back from a tour of England in May that saw both Scott Hall and Curt Hennig lose their jobs, and Stone Cold Steve Austin temporarily walking out of the company over creative differences that same month. It was definitely a rocky year for the company formerly known as the World Wrestling Federation.

In 2003 WWE were slowly finding its way in regards to the brand expansion.

By that summer of 2003, the company had divided their pay per view schedule to include SmackDown brand-only shows and RAW brand-only shows in addition to the "big four" of the Royal Rumble, WrestleMania, SummerSlam and Survivor Series.

In addition to the divided pay per views, the championship scene was made much clearer as each brand had their own World Championship and Tag Championship. Plus the Intercontinental Championship was resurrected and brought back to the RAW brand, while the United States Championship was returned to the SmackDown brand. RAW also got control of the Women's Championship while SmackDown had the Cruiserweight Title.

The two brands continued to develop their separate identities while new superstars developed on-screen to replace stars that were fading away. Monday Night RAW gained a dose of star power once Goldberg joined the roster the night after WrestleMania XIX. He immediately went through top stars like The

Rock and Chris Jericho en route to defeating Triple H for the World Heavyweight Championship in September.

The other juggernaut on RAW was Triple H and his new stable of Evolution. Triple H had a stranglehold on the World Heavyweight Championship and tore through the roster, defeating Scott Steiner, Booker T, Shawn Michaels, Kevin Nash and Kane throughout the year in order to keep hold of the belt. He represented the "present" in Evolution while Ric Flair was the "past" and Randy Orton and Dave Batista were the "future." And by year's end they controlled all the men's titles on the RAW brand, solidifying their dominance.

Over on the SmackDown brand, Brock Lesnar and Kurt Angle were kings. The two men brought a new element to the WWE main event scene with their high-impact, high offence, athletic matches. They were in the main event of WrestleMania XIX and then carried their rivalry through the summer and fall of the year, competing in a variety of match types.

Also at WrestleMania XIX, while Angle and Lesnar were making new stars of themselves,

an old star in Stone Cold Steve Austin said goodbye. He lost a great match to The Rock that ultimately was his final in-ring match. He stuck around WWE television to act as on-air authority figure but it was clear that the old Stone Cold was gone.

In the year 2003 WWE also realised the potential of their vast video library that spanned numerous promotions, and the profit-making ability it had. Most notably multi-disc releases highlighting Shawn Michaels (From the Vault) and Ric Flair (The Ultimate Ric Flair Collection) gave the world a glimpse of the types of DVD collections WWE could produce.

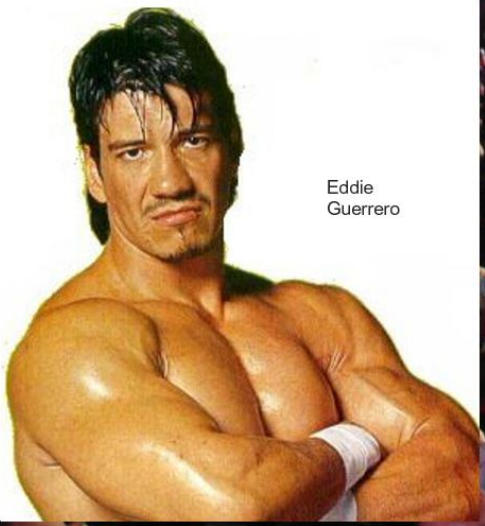
In 2004 WWE was all about the ascension of two friends (Chris Benoit and Eddie Guerrero) to the main event and the continued rise of new stars like Randy Orton, John Cena, Shelton Benjamin, Edge and Batista.

With former top stars like The Rock, Mick Foley, Goldberg, Brock Lesnar, Stone Cold Steve Austin, Scott Steiner and Kevin Nash out of the picture it was essential for new blood in the main event scene. The year started out with Chris Benoit lasting over an hour in the 2004 Royal Rumble match to earn a World Championship match at WrestleMania. He elected to challenge the RAW brand's Triple H for the World Heavyweight Title, which allowed his long-time friend Eddie Guerrero to win a SmackDown brand-only Royal Rumble match to secure himself a WWE Championship as well.

Guerrero was the first to capture gold as he defeated Brock Lesnar at No Way Out in February to become an unlikely WWE Champion. The match was truly fantastic all around and one of the most emotional victory celebrations of the decade. Meanwhile Benoit, along with Shawn Michaels, challenged Triple H in a triple threat match for the World Heavyweight Championship at WrestleMania XX. Benoit, the far and away underdog, came out victorious after making Triple H submit. The end of the pay per view saw longtime friends and perennial mid-card journeymen Benoit and Guerrero celebrate their success with an emotionally charged celebration.

That moment, a favourite of many wrestling fans, is now destroyed permanently thanks to Eddie Guerrero's premature death in 2005 and Chris Benoit's subsequent murdering of his family and suicide in 2007.

Shortly after WrestleMania, WWE experimented with the brand expansion once again and instituted its first ever draft in an attempt to freshen up both the RAW and SmackDown rosters. Each brand would randomly draw five names of the opposing roster, who would then switch sides immediately. In what has now



Eddie Guerrero

JBL

become a yearly tradition, this initial draft was used to move young stars to a new place, break up pre-existing alliances without causing violent break-ups and drastically change characters. The biggest success of the first draft was the move of Shelton Benjamin from SmackDown to RAW. While on SmackDown he was part of a low level tag team with Charlie Haas, but on his first night on RAW he defeated Triple H and instantly endured himself to the fans and immediately made himself a player in his new environment.

Meanwhile the rest of the year on the RAW brand featured Triple H and his Evolution super group battling a variety of opponents, including Benoit, Michaels, Shelton Benjamin, Edge, Tajiri, Chris Jericho and the unlikely phenomenon known as Eugene. Eugene, an idiot savant character played by supremely talented wrestler Nick Dinsmore, was supposed to be a comedy character that was "simple" on the outside but could emulate pro wrestling with ease. The character took off like crazy in the summer of 2004 and became a main event sensation for a period of time during the year.

On SmackDown, Eddie Guerrero was definitely the people's choice for WWE Champion, but he was personally feeling the pressures of being the face of the company and asked to lose the Championship. Big Show and Kurt Angle were out with injuries, Undertaker was only working part-time, John Cena wasn't ready yet and Brock Lesnar had left for greener pastures, so it was decided that perennial mid-carder Bradshaw would get the ball. The former card playing, beer drinking, bodyguard for hire was transformed literally overnight into John "Bradshaw" Layfield, the rich tycoon from Texas who had now found wealth and success in New York City.

Two months after the transformation into JBL, he defeated Guerrero in a terribly bloody Texas Bullrope Match at Judgment Day in May to become the WWE Champion. Backlash among fans and analysts over the Title change and rapid rise up the card for JBL was immediate. While the new character was effective the feeling was that it all happened too fast, as opposed to a more organic change and ascension. Over the course of the year, JBL grew into the role of Champion and was a hated villain who drew crowds to the arenas to watch him eventually lose.

WrestleMania XX was a true milestone for the company. In addition to the being the twentieth installment of the iconic supercard, and in their home base of Madison Square Garden no less, it set the trend for future WrestleMania events in that the show become a four hour extravaganza, complete with catchy taglines and theme songs and would act as the centrepiece for an entire weekend of events. In addition the card was one of the most memorable in a long time. It featured a phenomenal Christian-Chris Jericho singles match, the trainwreck of the Goldberg-Brock Lesnar match, two great Title matches in Eddie Guerrero-Kurt Angle and the Benoit-Michaels-Triple H triple threat and the last match of The Rock. In addition John Cena defeated The Big Show in the opening match of the show to become United States Champion and set himself on the road to superstardom. Plus The Undertaker returned from exile, ditched the biker character he had used during the first part of the decade and returned to his roots as the old school dead man Undertaker character.

To be continued....

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